











THE  
MIDDLE  
CLASSES  
(LES PETITS BOURGEOIS)

\* BY \*  
H. DE BALZAC

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## PREFACE

A MAIN—I should myself be disposed to say *the* main—interest of *Les Petits Bourgeois* arises from the fact that it was not only the last published, except scraps, of Balzac's works, but was actually never included in the various editions of the *Comédie Humaine* till the appearance of the so-called *édition définitive* a few years ago. In the famous collection of five-and-fifty squat volumes in which most people have made acquaintance with him it does not appear, and M. de Lovenjoul himself speaks of it as ‘too little known.’ It is supposed to have been, as *Le Député d'Arcis* certainly was, finished by Charles Rabou; but the extent of his contribution does not appear to be known. The critic just referred to thinks that it cannot have been great, because Balzac, some years before his death, speaks of the book as ‘nearly finished.’ It is always wise to differ with M. de Lovenjoul extremely cautiously and diffidently, for his knowledge of Balzac is as boundless as his absence of pretension or dictatorship on the subject is remarkable. But I venture to observe that there are several other books of which Balzac at different times speaks as having been far advanced, if not actually ready for publication, yet of which no trace seems to exist even in M. de Lovenjoul's own extensive collection of unprinted ‘Remains.’ Still, there can be little doubt that the later parts of *Les Petits Bourgeois* exhibit far less mark of an alien hand than the later parts of the *Député d'Arcis*. And though, if the book was actually finished, or nearly so, by the author himself, it seems strange that he should not have issued it,

anxious as he always was to make money ; yet his absence from France, his illnesses, his unlucky devotion to the theatre, and other things during the last three or four years of his life, supply not altogether insufficient explanations of the failure.

If we suppose that he actually finished it, or that he left with it and with the *Député* distinct instructions to Rabou for its completion, we may observe some things of interest about the pair. One is their very great length as compared with most of their fellows. Only three other numbers of the *Comédie*—*Illusions Perdues*, *Les Gélibataires*, and *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*—equal them in general length, and all these three are practically collections of separate tales, with a certain community of subject. But it must also be remembered that *La Cousine Bette*, their greatest and most immediate forerunner, is much longer than any other undivided single book. And from this, I think, it is not improper to infer that Balzac was experiencing a leaning towards longer stories, which might have had distinct results if he had gone on.

Secondly, in both stories, and here particularly in parts where there is no reason to question the appearance of his own work, we note not merely an apparent desire to wind up the clew of the histories of divers important personages, but also a tendency to refer and cross-refer to the earlier numbers of the *Comédie* in a way which may be found slightly irritating, but which is significant. For we know that in the magnificent dreams, the 'lordly keeps of Spain,' which Balzac cherished and dwelt in, the present *Comédie*, huge as it is, was, to keep the Dantean phrase, not an entire Commedia but only a Cantica of one—that there were to be other collections standing to it as the whole of the present mass stands to the divisions or Scenes. It was therefore natural that this task of winding up the clews should seem desirable to him. As in the *Député a' Arcis* we see the last of Vautrin, so here we part with an old—

it is impossible to say, friend, but acquaintance,' in Corentin. And it may be a slight bribe to the belief that the thing is really Balzac's if we note that thus we leave off as we began; that as in *Les Chouans*, the revelation of the author, we heard of the spy's first exploits, so here we leave him breaking his wand, or rather transferring it to la Peyrade, with the exulting but ominous declaration that 'all things pass except the police and the necessity for it,' a sort of translation, in Balzac's key, of Joseph de Maistre's famous theory that society rests on the executioner. One may sigh for a little poetical justice, and wish that the manes of Montauran and Mlle. de Verneuil, of Michu and others, had not remained unavenged; but that would have counter-worked Balzac's principles, sound enough if not pushed too far, that the *salus reipublicae* has precedence of all private rights and wrongs.

Not a very great deal need be said of the book itself. It has a certain resemblance to its great predecessor or contemporary or follower (for the dates are not certain), *La Cousine Bette*; but is almost entirely destitute of tragedy, except in the painful but happily-ending episode of Lydie de la Peyrade. In the minuteness of its attention to municipal matters, it shows almost as strongly as *Le Député d'Arcis* how Balzac's mind, under the conditions of the later July Monarchy, had been drawn to the subject of public life. I do not know whether it would be going too far to assume that it also shows, taken with *La Cousine Bette*, a certain tendency to exchange the technically 'high' life in which the author had earlier delighted for the financial and *bourgeois* element which (as, to do him justice, he had long ago foreseen) was overtaking it hand over hand in point of political and social importance, and was, as he anticipated, to supersede it mainly under the Second Empire, and almost wholly under the Third Republic. The details, scenes, and characters, if not for Balzac extraordinarily brilliant, show at least no falling off. The Thuillier

and Colleville households are ignoble, but not absolutely disgusting, and the intrigues of Céritet, and others about the ‘succession Thuillier,’ though something of a double on *Le Cousin Pons*, are sufficiently different. But the author no doubt meant the main interest to centre on Théodore de la Peyrade and his amateur performance of something like the same honourable offices to which his uncle’s Mephistophelian friend destined and devoted him. La Peyrade is of that class of persons who, as the Scotch judge remarked, ‘are clever chiels, but would be nane the waur of a hanging.’ But he repents and makes such amends as are possible for his chief overt crime, and he too is not disgusting.

The book, when in his letters Balzac spoke of it as first nearly finished and then actually ‘set up,’ bore the title of *Les Petits Bourgeois de Paris*, but nobody seems to have seen the MS. or the proofs. It actually appeared in the *Pays* during the autumn of 1854, and was afterwards issued as a book by the publisher de Potter in eight volumes — four bearing the present title in 1856, and the other four as *Les Parvenus* in 1857. The first part had twenty-seven, and the second twenty-five chapter divisions with headings. M. de Lovenjoul does not mention whether there was any special authority for the suppression of these when the book was at last, a few years ago, made part of the *Comédie*, or whether it was done in accordance with Balzac’s usual practice.

G. S.

## THE MIDDLE CLASSES

*To Constance Victoire*

*This, Madame, is one of the works which drop in on the author's mind, we know not whence, and please him before he can foresee what welcome they may receive from the public—the supreme judge in our day. Feeling almost sure that you will look kindly on my infatuation, I dedicate this book to you: is it not yours by right, as of old a tithe was due to the Church, in memory of God who makes all things grow and ripen in the fields and in the mind?*

*Some lumps of clay left by Molière at the foot of his colossal statue of Tartuffe have here been moulded by a hand less skilful than bold; still, however far I must remain beneath the greatest of comic writers, I shall be satisfied to have utilised these fragments, picked up from before the curtain of his stage, to show the modern hypocrite at work.*

*What has been most disheartening in this difficult task was finding it incompatible with any religious question, since for you, who are so pious, I had to avoid them, apart from what a great writer calls the ‘general indifference to matters of religion.’*

*May the meaning of your two names be prophetic of the fortunes of the book! And regard this, I entreat you, as an expression of respectful gratitude from one who ventures to sign himself your most devoted servant,*

DE BALZAC.

## PART I

THE Tourniquet (or Turnstile) Saint-Jean, of which a description seemed at the time so superfluous in the tale entitled *A Second Family*, was a primitive relic of old Paris which has ceased to exist but in that record. The building of the Hotel de Ville in its modern form has cleared a whole quarter of the city.

In 1830 the passers-by could still see the Turnstile represented as the sign of a wine-shop, but that house, its last refuge, has since been demolished. Old Paris, alas! is vanishing with terrible rapidity. Here and there, in these books of mine, something will survive; a typical house of mediæval times like that described in the beginning of *The Cat and Racket* — a few such specimens may still be seen; or the house in the Rue du Fouarre inhabited by Judge Popinot, an example of old citizen dwellings. Here, the remains of the Fulbert's house; there, the Port of the Seine in the time of Charles IX. Why should not the chronicles of French social life, like another *Old Mortality*, rescue these remarkable records of the past, as Walter Scott's old man restored the tombstones?

The protests of literature during these ten years past were certainly not superfluous; art is again beginning to cover with its flowers the squalid fronts of the houses built for trade purposes, which one of our writers has compared to cupboards.

It may here be incidentally remarked that the creation of a municipal board *del Ornamento* such as, in Milan, regulates the architecture of streets, every proprietor having to submit his plans to its arbitration, dates from the twelfth century. And who can have failed to recognise in that charming capital the effects of patriotism in the nobles and citizen class alike, and to admire the character and originality of the private buildings?

The hideous and delirious spirit which, year after year, lowers the storeys of our houses, squeezes a whole set of rooms into the space of a single drawing-room, and wages war to the death against town gardens, must inevitably react on Paris habits. We shall soon be obliged to live out of our houses much more than in them. The sacredness of private life, the liberty of home — where are they? They are not to be had for less than fifty thousand francs a year. And, indeed, few millionaires even allow themselves the luxury of a whole small house protected by a court-yard from the street, and sheltered from the curiosity of the neighbours by a shady garden-plot.

The Code, which regulates the distribution of inherited fortunes by equalising incomes, has led to this building of brick and mortar phalansteries to lodge thirty families, and yield a hundred thousand francs a year.

And so, fifty years hence, we may easily count the houses that will be left of the class inhabited by the Thuillier family at the time when this story opens; a really curious house deserving the honour of a detailed description, if it were only for the sake of comparing the citizen class of the past with its representatives to-day. And the situation and appearance of this residence, the setting of this picture of daily life, had a stamp, an aroma of middle-class existence, which may prove attractive or repulsive, as the reader may take it.

To begin with, the house did not belong to Monsieur or to Madame Thuillier, but to Mademoiselle Thuillier, Monsieur Thuillier's elder sister. This house, purchased by Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne-Brigitte Thuillier in the course of the six months immediately following the revolution of 1830, stands about half-way down the Rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer, on the right-hand side coming from the Rue d'Enfer, so that the house in which Monsieur Thuillier lived faces the south.

The steady migration of the Paris population towards

the higher ground on the right bank of the Seine, deserting the left bank, had for some time damaged the sale of property in the so-called *quartier Latin*, where certain reasons, which will appear from the character and habits of Monsieur Thuillier, made his sister decide on the purchase of a freehold. She was able to buy this one for the merely nominal price of forty-six thousand francs; additional items mounted up to six thousand francs: fifty-two thousand francs in all. A detailed description of the property in the style of an advertisement, and of the improvements effected by Monsieur Thuillier, will explain the way in which some fortunes were made in July, 1830, while others were undermined.

Towards the street the house showed a front of stucco masonry, eaten by the weather, furrowed by the rain, and grooved by the plasterer's tool to imitate stone. This sort of façade is so common in Paris, and so ugly, that the municipality ought to offer prizes to owners who would build new fronts in carved stone. This drab wall, pierced by seven windows, was three storeys high, and crowned by attics and a tiled roof. The carriage gateway, wide and strong, showed by its style and structure that the side towards the street had been first built at the time of the Empire, to utilise part of the court-yard of an extensive older house, surviving from the time when this quarter was in some favour as a residence.

On one side of the gateway was the porter's lodge; on the other the stairs went up of this front half of the house. Two wings adjoining the neighbouring houses on each side had formerly been the coach-houses, stabling, kitchens, and servants' quarters for the house at the back of the court-yard; but these, since 1830, had been rented as warehouses. The right-hand side was occupied by a wholesale stationer, Monsieur Métivier *nephew*; the left side by a bookseller named Barbet. Their offices were over the storerooms and shops, the bookseller occupying the first

floor, and the stationer the second floor, of the house on the street. Métivier, a paper broker rather than a merchant, and Barbet, more busied in discounting bills than in selling books, used these extensive premises for storing job lots of stationery purchased from manufacturers in difficulties in Métivier's half, and in Barbet's, the editions of books he had taken in security for loans. The shark of the bookselling trade and the pike of the paper business lived on very friendly terms, and their transactions, having none of the bustle of a retail trade, brought but few carriages into that quiet court-yard, where there was so little traffic that the porter had to weed the grass out now and again from between the stones. Messieurs Barbet and Métivier, who hardly figure even as supernumeraries in this tale, paid rare visits to their landlord, and their punctuality in paying their rent placed them in the category of excellent tenants: the Thuillier circle regarded them as very honest folks.

The third floor facing the street was divided into two sets of rooms, one occupied by Monsieur Dutocq, clerk to a justice of the peace, a retired official who frequented the Thuillier's drawing-room; the other was tenanted by the hero of this tale. For the present, however, we must be satisfied to know the amount of his rent — seven hundred francs — and the position he had taken up in the heart of the citadel three years before the curtain rises on this domestic drama.

Of these two sets of rooms the clerk, a bachelor of fifty, occupied the larger; he kept a cook and paid a rent of a thousand francs.

Two years after buying the house and ground, Mademoiselle Thuillier was getting seven thousand two hundred francs a year in rents; the former owner had left it fitted with outside shutters, had redecorated the interior, and finished it with mirrors, without ever succeeding in selling or letting it; and the Thuilliers themselves, very handsomely

housed as will be seen, had one of the best gardens in that part of Paris, the trees shading the deserted little street called the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Catherine.

That part of the house which they inhabited, between the forecourt and garden, seemed to have been built to gratify the whim of some wealthy citizen in the time of Louis XIV., or that perhaps of a president of the *Parlement*, or of some peace-loving and learned student. There was a certain imposing *Louis-quatorzian* air in the handsome masonry, though the stone was weather-worn ; the courses were marked out by grooves ; the panelling in red brick was a reminder of the stables at Versailles ; the windows, arched above, had masks on the keystone and to support the sill. The door, the upper half of glass in small panes, showing the garden beyond, was of the unpretending, sound style frequently seen in the lodges of royal residences.

This dwelling, with five windows across, had but two storeys above the ground floor, and was handsomely capped with a four-sided roof ending in weathercocks, and broken by well-designed chimneys and oval garret windows. The building, as it stood, may perhaps have been the surviving portion of some larger aristocratic hotel ; still, after consulting the plans of Paris, no data seem to confirm this conjecture ; moreover, the title-deeds in Mademoiselle Thuillier's possession mention Petitot, the famous enamel painter, as the owner in Louis XIV.'s time, and he had it from the President Lecamus. It is probable that the President lived in this house while his famous hotel in the Rue de Thorigny was in course of building.

Thus Law and Art alike had left their traces there. And how liberal a view of necessity and pleasure had presided over the arrangements of the dwelling ! To the right, on entering the hall, a spacious square room, was a stone staircase, with two windows to the garden ; under the stairs was a door to the cellars. From the hall opened the dining-room with windows to the court-yard, and a door beyond

to the kitchens adjoining Barbet's stores. Behind the stairs on the garden side was a splendid study, also with two windows. The first and second floors each formed a separate set of apartments ; the servants' rooms were shown by the dormer windows at each side of the roof.

The fine square hall contained a magnificent stove, and it was amply lighted by the two glass doors, front and back. It was paved with black and white marble, and had a decorative coffered ceiling of which the carved beams and bosses had once been painted and gilt, but, under the Empire no doubt, had since been whitewashed ; opposite the stove was a red marble cistern with a marble basin.

Over the three doors of the drawing-room, study, and dining-room were oval panels with pictures that cried out for much-needed restoration ; the mouldings were heavy, but the decoration was not devoid of merit.

The drawing-room, wainscotted throughout, was reminiscent of the age of magnificence in its Languedoc marble chimney-place, in its ceiling with ornaments in the corners, and in the shape of the windows with their small panes. The dining-room, parallel with the drawing-room with double doors between, was floored with marble ; the paneling entirely of oak and unpainted ; but the tapestry had been replaced by villainous modern paper. The coffered ceiling of chestnut wood remained unspoilt. The study, modernised by Thuillier, was wholly discordant. The white and gold ornament of the drawing-room was so completely faded that only red lines were to be seen in the place of the gold, and the white paint had turned yellow and streaky, and was flaking off.

The Latin idea *Otium cum dignitate* has never, to a poet's eyes, been more admirably suggested than in this fine old house. The ironwork of the balustrade to the stairs was worthy in style of the Judge and of the Artist ; but to discern their traces in these relics of a dignified antiquity the observing eye of an artist was needed.

The Thuilliers and their immediate predecessors had done much dishonour to this gem of wealthy citizenship by their middle-class habits and tastes. Imagine walnut-wood chairs with horsehair seats; a mahogany table with an oil-cloth cover; lamps in stamped metal; a cheap paper with a red border; atrocious black and white prints on the walls, and cotton curtains with a red binding — in this dining-room where Petitot's friends had feasted. Conceive of the effect in the drawing-room of the portraits of Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Thuillier, by Pierre Grassou, the painter of their class; of card-tables that had done twenty years' service; consoles of the time of the Empire, and a tea-table supported on a huge lyre; a set of furniture in coarse mahogany covered with printed velvet on a chocolate ground! On the chimney-piece stood a clock with a figure representing Bellona, and candelabra with fluted columns; the curtains of worsted damask and the worked muslin curtains were looped back with stamped brass chains. A second-hand carpet covered the polished floor.

The handsome hall was furnished with benches covered with plush, and the carved panelling was hidden behind cupboards and wardrobes of various dates, removed from all the places where the Thuilliers had ever lived. The cistern was covered by a shelf to carry a smoky lamp dating from 1815. And to crown all, fear, that hideous bogie, had led to the addition of double doors both to the garden and the forecourt, strongly sheathed in iron, opened back against the wall by day, but shut by night.

It is easy to trace the deplorable desecration of this monument of domestic life in the seventeenth century by the domestic life of the nineteenth. When Napoleon first was Consul perhaps some master builder, having purchased this little freehold, thought he would make some use of the part of the forecourt next the street; he probably destroyed a noble gateway flanked by lodges which gave importance to this elegant residence, to use an old-fashioned word, and

the thrift of a Parisian builder stamped its blight on the very front of its elegance; just as the newspapers and their printing-presses, the manufactory and its warehouses, trade and its counting-houses, have ousted the aristocracy, the old citizen-class, finance and law, wherever they had displayed their magnificence.

A very curious study is that of the history of title-deeds in Paris! In the Rue des Batailles a madhouse stands where once was the house of the Chevalier Pierre Bayard du Terrail; the ‘third estate’ has built a whole street on the land occupied by the Hôtel Necker. Old Paris is going — following the kings who are gone. For one gem of architecture saved by a Polish princess,<sup>1</sup> how many smaller palaces have fallen, like Petitot’s house, into the hands of such as the Thuilliers.

The incidents which led to Mademoiselle Thuillier’s purchasing this property were as follows.

At the fall of the Villèle administration Monsieur Louis Jérôme Thuillier, who had been for six and twenty years a clerk in the civil service, found himself a second clerk, but hardly had he tasted the joys of such deputy authority — formerly the smallest of his hopes — when the events of July, 1830, compelled him to resign. He very ingeniously calculated that the new men, only too glad to have another place at their command, would deal promptly and handsomely with the question of his pension; and he was right, for it was at once fixed at seventeen hundred francs.

When the cautious second clerk first mooted the idea of retiring, his sister, who was far more his life’s partner than his wife had ever been, trembled for his future prospects.

‘What would Thuillier do with himself?’ was the ques-

<sup>1</sup> The Hôtel Lambert, Ile Saint-Louis, in which the Princess Czartoriska took up her abode.

tion the two women asked each other with equal fears ; they were at that time living in a small apartment on the third floor in the Rue d'Argenteuil.

'Settling the matter of his pension will keep him busy for some time,' said Mademoiselle Thuillier. 'But I am thinking of investing my money in a way that will keep his hands full. It will be almost as good as being in an office to have an estate to manage.'

'Oh, my dear sister, we will save his life!' cried Madame Thuillier.

'Well, I have always foreseen this critical moment in Jérôme's life,' said the old maid with a patronising air.

Mademoiselle Thuillier had too often heard her brother say : 'Such an one is dead ; he only lived two years after retiring !' — she had too often heard Colleville, Thuillier's intimate friend and, like him, a government clerk, jesting about the grand climacteric of office life, saying : 'We shall come to it too, all in good time !' — not to appreciate the risk for her brother.

The transition from routine to idleness is in fact the critical time for the civil servant. The men who are incapable of substituting some occupation for the business they have left change very much ; some die, a great many take to fishing — a vacuous employment not unlike their office work ; others, of more active habits, buy shares in a business, lose their savings, and are glad at last to take a place in the working of the concern which, after the first failure and bankruptcy, succeeds in the hands of cleverer men on the look-out for it ; then the clerk can rub his now empty hands and say, 'I always knew there was a future before us.'

But most of them struggle against their old habits.

'Some,' said Colleville, 'are victims to depression of a kind peculiar to government clerks. They die of suppressed circulars ; they suffer from red-tape-worm. Little old Poiret could never see a white letter folio edged with blue

without changing colour at the beloved sight; he turned yellow instead of green.'

Mademoiselle Thuillier was regarded as the genius of her brother's household; she had plenty of force and decision, as her personal history will show. This superiority, which was but relative, enabled her to gauge her brother, though she worshipped him. After seeing the wreck of the hopes she had founded on her idol, there was too much of the mother in her feeling to allow her to overestimate the social calibre of the retired clerk.

Thuillier and his sister were the children of the head porter at the Exchequer office. Jérôme, being very short-sighted, had escaped every form of requisition and conscription. The father's ambition was to see his son a clerk. At the beginning of the century there were so many places to fill in the army that the vacancies in the offices were many, and the death of under-clerks enabled burly old Thuillier to see his son mount the lowest steps of the official ladder.

The old man died in 1814, when Jérôme was about to be made second clerk; but this hope was all the fortune he had to leave him. Old Thuillier and his wife who died in 1810, had retired in 1806, their life pension all their wealth, having spent their income in giving Jérôme his education and in keeping him and his sister.

The effect of the Restoration on government offices is well known. A mass of clerks were turned out of employment by the suppression of forty-one government departments, honest men ready to take places below those they had been deprived of. The ranks of these men, who had earned their claims, were swelled by the members of exiled families ruined by the Revolution. Jérôme, squeezed between these two bodies of recruits, thought himself lucky not to be dismissed on some frivolous pretext. He quaked till the day when by good chance he was made second clerk and saw himself sure of a decent pension.

This brief sketch accounts for Monsieur Thuillier's limited purview and lack of general knowledge. He had learnt such Latin, arithmetic, history, and geography as boys are taught at school, but he had not risen above what was called the second class because his father seized the opportunity of getting him into the office, boasting of his son's 'splendid hand.' So, though little Thuillier wrote the first list of names in the State ledger, he missed his course of rhetoric and philosophy.

Once made a wheel of the official machinery he troubled himself little about letters, and still less about art; he imbibed an empirical knowledge of his own line of business; and when, under the Empire, he rose to mix with the superior class of clerks, he caught the superficial manners that hid the porter's son, but he failed to catch even the semblance of ready wit. His ignorance warned him to be silent, and his taciturnity did him good service. Under the Imperial system he trained himself to the passive obedience which superiors appreciate, and it was to this qualification that he subsequently owed his advancement to be second clerk. The fruit of routine was great experience; his manner and his silent habits concealed his want of education.

These negative merits constituted a recommendation when a cipher was needed. There was the risk of offending one of two parties in the Chamber, each anxious to place a man, and the authorities got out of the difficulty by falling back on the rule of seniority. That was how Thuillier became a second clerk.

Mademoiselle Thuillier, knowing that her brother abhorred reading, and could not go into any business as a substitute for the task-work of the office, had wisely determined to give him the cares of property, the management of a garden, the minute trivialities of middle-class life, and the trifling intrigues of neighbourly gossip.

So the removal of the household from the Rue d'Argen-

teuil to the Rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer, the business involved in the purchase, the selection of a porter, the search for tenants, all kept Thuillier busy through 1831-1832. When this great transplantation was achieved, when the sister saw that Jérôme had survived the uprooting, she gave him further employment, as we shall presently see, for which she found a basis in her brother's nature; this may at once be described.

Though only a superior porter's son, Jérôme was what is called a fine man; above the medium height, slightly built, not bad looking with his spectacles on, but, like many short-sighted persons, hideous as soon as he took them off, for the habit of seeing through glasses had induced a sort of mist over his eyes. Between the age of eighteen and thirty young Thuillier was a favourite with women in the social sphere that rests on the middle class and ends below the head clerks of Departments; but, as is well known, under the Empire the wars left Paris society somewhat bereft by taking every man of any energy out to the battle-field; and to this, perhaps, as a great physician has surmised, the decadence of the generation living in the middle of the nineteenth century may be due.

Thuillier, compelled to attract attention by some accomplishments other than intellectual, learned to dance and waltz so well as to be noted; he was called 'handsome Thuillier'; he played billiards to perfection; he cut out paper very ingeniously; his friend Colleville taught him so well that he could sing some fashionable ballads. These little accomplishments procured him the spurious success which deceives the young, and deludes them as to the future. Mademoiselle Thuillier, from 1806 till 1814, believed in her brother as Mademoiselle d'Orléans believed in Louis-Philippe; she was proud of Jérôme; she pictured him the head of an office, thanks to the popularity which at that time gave him access to a few drawing-rooms where he certainly never would have been seen but for the circum-

stances which made society under the Empire a perfect hotchpotch.

However, handsome Thuillier's triumphs were not usually of long duration; women no more cared to keep him than he cared to be perpetually faithful; he might have served as the hero of a comedy called 'Don Juan in spite of himself.' This business of being handsome bored Thuillier till it made him look old; and his face, covered with wrinkles like that of an antiquated beauty, credited him with twelve years more than the baptismal register. He had retained a habit of glancing at himself in the glass, putting his hands on his hips to set off his figure, and assuming the attitudes of a dancing master, all of which prolonged the lease of the nickname 'handsome Thuillier' beyond the advantages which had bestowed it on him.

What was true in 1806 was sarcastic in 1826. He still preserved some vestiges of the dress of the dandy of the Empire, nor were they unbecoming to the dignity of a retired second clerk. He wore the full plaited neckcloth burying his chin, with ends that imperilled the passers-by projecting from a neatly smart knot, tied of yore by fairer hands. Following the fashions at a respectful distance he adapted them to his own style, wore his hat very far back, shoes in summer and fine stockings. His long overcoat was a reminiscence of the *lèvite* of the Empire; he would not give up plaited shirt-frills and white waistcoats, he was always playing with his switch, a fashion of 1810, and held himself very upright. No one, seeing Thuillier walking on the boulevards, would have taken him for the son of a man who served the clerks' breakfasts at the office of the Exchequer; he looked like a *diplomate* of the Empire, or a *sous-préfet*.

Now not only did Mademoiselle Thuillier very innocently encourage her brother's vanity by inciting him to the utmost care of his person, which was but the outcome of her worship, but she gave him all the joys of family life by

transplanting close to him a household whose existence had run almost parallel with theirs.

Its head was Monsieur Colleville, Thuillier's intimate friend ; but before describing Pylades it is all the more necessary to have done with Orestes, since it must be explained why Thuillier, handsome Thuillier, found himself without a family, for without children the family is not, and here must be revealed one of those deep mysteries which lie buried among the arcana of private life, a few symptoms only rising to the surface when the anguish of a hidden sorrow becomes too acute : the life, namely, of Madame and Mademoiselle Thuillier ; for so far we have seen only the public life, so to speak, of Jérôme Thuillier.

Marie-Jeanne-Brigitte Thuillier, four years older than her brother, was immolated for his benefit ; it was easier to give him a profession than to give her a marriage portion. To some natures ill-fortune is a pharos lighting up the dark and squalid places in social life. Superior to her brother both in energy and intelligence, Brigitte had a character which the sledge-hammer of persecution makes dense, compact, and highly resistant, not to say inflexible. Eager for independence, she determined to escape from her life in the porter's lodge and be mistress of her own fate. At the age of fourteen she established herself in an attic not far from the Treasury, which was then in the Rue Vivienne, and near the Rue de la Vrillière where the Bank still stands. There she courageously set up in a little unfamiliar business under the privilege and patronage of her father's masters : the manufacture of money-bags for the Bank, the Treasury, and certain great banking-houses. By the end of three years she employed two workwomen.

Investing her savings in consols, by 1814 she found herself possessed of three thousand six hundred francs a year, the results of fifteen years' earnings. She spent but little, she dined with her father every day as long as he lived, and, as is known, French consols during the dying struggles

of the Empire went down to forty odd francs, so this sum, apparently exaggerated, is easily accounted for.

At the old man's death, Brigitte and Jérôme, aged respectively twenty-seven and twenty-three, set up house together. The brother and sister were most affectionately attached. When, in the days of his splendour, Jérôme was at any time in need of money, his sister, dressed in coarse stuff and her fingers skinned by the thread she sewed with, always had some louis to offer him. In Brigitte's eyes Jérôme was the handsomest and most charming man in all the French Empire. To keep house for this adored brother, to be admitted to the secrets of this Lindoro and Don Juan, was Brigitte's day-dream; she sacrificed herself almost passionately to an idol whose egoism she could magnify and hold sacred. She sold her business to her forewoman for fifteen thousand francs, and went to settle with Jérôme in the Rue d'Argenteuil, making herself the mother, protector, and slave of this *pet of the ladies*.

Brigitte, with the instinctive prudence of a woman who owed all she had to her own prudence and toil, hid the amount of her property from her brother; she was afraid, no doubt, of the prodigalities of a man so much in favour, and only brought six hundred francs a year to the common stock; this, added to Jérôme's eighteen hundred, enabled her to make both ends meet at the close of the year.

From the very first day of their partnership Thuillier listened to his sister as to an oracle, consulted her on even the most trifling matters, had no secrets from her, thus giving her a taste of the fruit of despotism which became her besetting sin. And, indeed, the sister had sacrificed everything to the brother, she had staked her all on his affection, she lived in and for him.

Her ascendancy over Jérôme was singularly confirmed by the marriage she contrived for him in 1814.

Witnessing the nipping squeeze in government offices that resulted from the newcomers under the Restoration,

and more especially from the return of the old society which trampled down the citizen class, Brigitte understood, and indeed her brother explained to her, the bearing of the crisis that was extinguishing all their hopes. There could be no further successes for handsome Thuillier among the nobility who were succeeding to the plebeians of the Empire.

Thuillier was not capable of taking up a political opinion ; he felt, as did his sister, that he must make the best of his remaining youth to end with credit. In these circumstances an old maid as ambitious as Brigitte wished and determined to see her brother marry, as much for her own sake as for his, since she alone would make him happy, and Madame Thuillier would be but an accessory indispensable for the production of a child or two.

Though Brigitte's mind was hardly adequate to her will, at any rate she had the instinct that served her despotic temper ; she had no education, she simply went straight onward, with the persistency of a character accustomed to succeed. She had a genius for home management, the spirit of thrift, the talents of a housekeeper, and the love of work. She fully understood that she could never succeed in finding a wife for Jérôme in a class above their own, a family who would make inquiries as to their mode of life and perhaps be scared at finding a mistress already established in the home ; so she looked in a rank below for the people she might dazzle, and she found a suitable match under her hand.

The senior messenger of the Bank of France, named Lemprun, had a daughter, an only child, Céleste. Mademoiselle Céleste Lemprun would inherit her mother's fortune, she also being the only child of a market-gardener whose property consisted of some acres of land near Paris which the old man still cultivated. Then there would be the savings left by the worthy Lemprun, a man who, after being employed in the houses of Thellusson and of Keller, had entered service at the Bank when it was first started.

Lemprun, now a head servant, enjoyed the respect and esteem of the government officials and inspectors. Hence the Board of Directors, on hearing that Céleste was to be married to a respectable clerk in the civil service, promised a donation of six thousand francs ; and this sum, added to twelve thousand given by her father and twelve thousand from old Galard, the market-gardener at Auteuil, raised the marriage portion to thirty thousand francs. Old Galard and Monsieur and Madame Lemprun were delighted by this alliance ; the head messenger knew Mademoiselle Thuillier to be one of the most upright and respectable women in Paris. Brigitte gave lustre to her investments in the funds by assuring Lemprun that she would never marry, and neither he nor his wife, figures from the Golden Age, would have made so bold as to criticise Brigitte. They were especially struck by the handsome Thuillier's brilliant position, and the marriage was concluded to the satisfaction of all parties.

The governor and secretary of the Bank signed the documents as witnesses for the bride ; Monsieur de la Billardière, head of his department, and Monsieur Rabourdin, a head clerk, did the same for Thuillier.

Six days after the wedding old Lemprun was the victim of a very daring robbery, mentioned in the papers of the time, but quickly forgotten in the exciting events of 1815. The thieves having entirely evaded pursuit, Lemprun wished to pay for the loss ; and though the Bank in fact charged the sum to the account of bad debts, the poor old man died of grief caused by this disaster. He regarded it as a blow to his honesty of seventy years' standing.

Madame Lemprun gave the whole of her husband's money to her daughter, Madame Thuillier, and went to live with her father at Auteuil, where the old man died of an accident in 1817.

Alarmed at the thought of managing or letting her father's fields and gardens, Madame Lemprun, amazed at

Brigitte's capabilities and honesty, begged her to realise the property, and so arrange matters that her daughter should take everything into her own hands, allowing her fifteen hundred francs a year and leaving her the house at Auteuil. The old man's land, sold in lots, realised thirty thousand francs. Lemprun had left as much, and the two fortunes, added to Céleste's marriage portion, amounted in 1818 to ninety thousand francs.

Céleste's money had been invested in Bank shares at a time when they stood at nine hundred francs. With the sixty thousand francs Brigitte secured five thousand francs a year, for five per cents were at sixty, and she charged this, with fifteen hundred francs a year of life interest, to the Widow Lemprun. Thus, at the beginning of 1818, with Thuillier's salary of three thousand four hundred francs, Céleste's income of three thousand five hundred, and the dividends on thirty-four shares in the Bank of France, the annual sum passing through Brigitte's uncontrolled hands amounted to eleven thousand francs.

It was necessary to set forth this financial position from the beginning, not only to anticipate difficulties, but to clear the stage for the drama.

Brigitte in the first place allowed her brother five hundred francs a month, and so managed the house that five thousand a year paid all expenses; she allowed her sister-in-law fifty francs a month, demonstrating that she for her part was satisfied with forty. To secure her dominion by the power of money Brigitte hoarded the surplus of her private dividends; she was a money lender, it was said in the offices, her brother acting as her agent and discounting bills. Still, though Brigitte accumulated a capital of sixty thousand francs between 1813 and 1840, the existence of such a sum can be accounted for by transactions on 'change, the funds varying as much as forty per cent, without having recourse to accusations more or less veracious, of which the truth would add nothing to the interest of this story.

From the very first Brigitte broke in the hapless Madame Thuillier by a free use of the spurs and the sawing of the bit which she made her feel. But this luxury of tyranny was wasted ; the victim yielded at once. Céleste, justly gauged by Brigitte, devoid of spirit and education, accustomed to a sedentary life and tranquil atmosphere, was excessively placid by nature, pious in the widest sense of the word, and ready to expiate by the hardest penance the most involuntary fault that could inflict pain on another. She was absolutely ignorant of life, accustomed to be waited on by her mother, who did all the work herself, and compelled to keep very quiet by a lymphatic constitution, which made the least exertion a fatigue. She was a typical child of the Paris middle class, where such children are constantly seen, rarely gifted with beauty,—the product of poverty, of overwork, of airless dwellings, bereft of freedom and of all the conveniences of life.

At the time of her marriage Céleste was a little woman, nauseatingly fair and colourless, fat, slow, and very stupid-looking. Her forehead, too high and prominent, suggested water on the brain, and under that dome a face evidently too small and ending in a point like a mouse's snout, led some of the guests to hint that she might sooner or later go out of her mind. Her pale blue eyes, and lips set in a perpetual smile, did not contradict the idea. On her wedding-day, a solemn occasion, she had the look, the manner, and the attitude of a person condemned to death, and only hoping it will be soon over.

'She is a little soft!' said Colleville to Thuillier.

Brigitte was the knife that would stab this nature, the utmost contrast to her own. She had a stamp of beauty in her regular and classic features, but destroyed by the toil which from her infancy had kept her bent over coarse and unbeautiful work, and by the privations she voluntarily endured to amass her little hoard. Her complexion, washed to a polish at a very early age, had the hue of steel. Her

dark eyes were set in black, or rather in bruised circles ; her upper lip was marked with dark down, a sort of sootiness ; her lips were thin, and her imperious forehead was crowned by hair that had been black, but was fast turning to chinchilla. She was as upright as any handsome woman could be, and everything about her betrayed a hard life, suppressed fires, and the cost of her gains.

To this woman Céleste was simply a fortune to absorb, a mother to mate, one more subject in her empire. She soon found fault with her for being so flabby,—a word constantly on her tongue,—and the acrid old maid, who would have been heartbroken if she had had a managing sister-in-law, found a savage pleasure in stinging this helpless creature to activity. Céleste, ashamed of seeing her sister-in-law display her housewifely energy and do the housework, tried to help her ; then she fell ill ; at once Brigitte was devoted in caring for her ; she nursed her like a sister, and would say before Jérôme : —

‘ You are not strong enough ; well, then, do nothing, poor child ! ’ emphasising Céleste’s incapacity with the display of pity by which the strong, affecting gentle compassion for the weak, contrive to insinuate their own praises.

But as all such despotic natures love to use their strength and show great tenderness for physical suffering, she nursed her sister-in-law so well that Céleste’s mother was quite satisfied when she came to see her.

When Madame Thuillier was well again Brigitte would say, in such a way as to be heard : ‘ Limp rag ! of no use whatever ! ’ and the like. Céleste retired to her room to weep, and when Thuillier found her in tears he would make excuses for his sister.

‘ She is as good as gold, but she is hot-tempered. She loves you after her own fashion ; she is just the same to me.’

And Céleste, remembering her sister-in-law’s motherly care, forgave her.

Brigitte regarded her brother as king of the household ; she praised him up to Céleste and treated him as an autocrat, a Ladislas, an infallible Pope. Madame Thuillier, bereft of her father and her grandfather, and almost deserted by her mother who came to see her on Thursdays, while they went to her on Sundays in the summer, had no one to love but her husband : in the first place because he was her husband, and also because to her he was always ‘handsome Thuillier.’ Besides, he sometimes behaved to her as if she were his wife, and for all these reasons combined she worshipped him. He seemed to her all the more perfect when he often took her part, and scolded his sister, not out of regard for Céleste but from sheer selfishness, to secure peace in the house during the few minutes he spent there. In fact Thuillier dined at home, and came in to bed very late ; he went to balls in his own circle, alone and exactly as though he were still a bachelor.

Thus the two women were always together. Céleste unconsciously adopted a passive attitude, and became, as Brigitte wished, a perfect slave. The Queen Elizabeth of the household went through a change from domineering to a sort of pity for this perpetually crushed victim. She finally set aside her haughty airs, her cutting words, her tone of contempt, feeling sure that she had bent her sister-in-law to the yoke.

As soon as she realised that her slave’s neck was bruised by the collar, she took care of her as of a piece of personal property, and Céleste knew better days. Then, comparing the end with the beginning, she felt a sort of affection for her tormentor.

The poor soul had but one chance that might have given her spirit to defend herself, to become something — somebody — in the household that lived on her money, though she did not know it, while she got nothing but the crumbs from the table ; but that chance never favoured her.

At the end of six years Céleste had no child.

This misfortune, over which, month after month, she shed torrents of tears, did much to add fuel to Brigitte's scorn; she pronounced her of no use at all, not even to bear children. The old maid, who had dreamed of loving her brother's children as if they were her own, was slow in getting used to the idea of this irremediable misfortune.

At the time when this story opens, in 1840, at the age of forty-six, Céleste had ceased to weep, for she was mournfully certain that she would never be a mother. Strange to say, after twenty-five years of a life in which victory had finally blunted and broken the knife, Brigitte was as fond of Céleste as Céleste was of her. Time, ample means, the incessant friction of daily life which had no doubt rubbed off the corners and smoothed down asperities, with Céleste's lamblike resignation and sweetness, had led to a serene autumn. And the two women were united by the one feeling they had ever known: their adoration for the fortunate and selfish Thuillier.

And then these two women, both childless, had each, like every woman who has longed in vain to be a mother, devoted herself to a child. This spurious motherhood, quite as absorbing as real motherhood, needs an explanation which brings us to the main action of the drama, and will account for the abundant occupation found by Mademoiselle Thuillier for her brother.

Thuillier had entered the office as supernumerary clerk at the same time as Colleville, who has already been mentioned as his intimate friend. Compared to the dull and methodical rule of Thuillier's house, social nature had created Colleville's as a complete contrast, and while it is impossible not to remark that this fortuitous contrast is far from moral, it must be added that before jumping to a conclusion it will be well to read the story to the end — a story for which, being but too true, the author cannot be held responsible.

This Colleville was the son of a clever musician, formerly first violin at the opera in the days of Francœur and Rebel. At least six times a month, as long as he lived, he would relate anecdotes about the performances of *Le Devin du Village*, imitating Jean-Jacques Rousseau with wonderful exactitude. Colleville and Thuillier were inseparable; they had no secrets from each other, and their friendship, begun at the age of fifteen, had known no cloud in 1839.

Colleville was one of the clerks called ‘pluralists’ in government offices. Such men are always distinguished by their industry. Colleville, who was a good musician, held by favour of his father’s name and influence the place of first clarinet player at the Opéra Comique, and as long as he was a bachelor, Colleville, being a little better off than Thuillier, often shared with his friend. But Colleville, unlike Thuillier, married to please himself: Mademoiselle Flavie, the illegitimate child of a famous opera-dancer who called the girl du Bourguier, asserting that she was the daughter of a rich contractor of that name who was ruined in 1800, and who forgot the child all the more completely because he had doubts as to the celebrated lady’s fidelity.

Flavie’s birth and appearance had destined her to a sorry fate when Colleville, having frequent occasion to visit her mother, who lived in luxury, fell in love with the girl and married her. Prince Galathionne, the dancer’s ‘protector’ in September, 1815, when her brilliant career was drawing to a close, gave Flavie twenty thousand francs as a wedding portion, and her mother furnished her with a magnificent trousseau. The visitors to her house made her presents of jewellery and plate, so the Collevilles started in housekeeping richer in superfluities than in capital.

Flavie, brought up in luxury, had at first a pretty apartment furnished by her mother’s decorator, and here the young wife held court, airing her taste for art and artists, amid a certain display of elegance.

Madame Colleville was pretty and *piquante*, bright, gay,

and gracious, and a thorough ‘good fellow.’ The dancer, who was now four and forty, retired from the stage and went to live in the country, thus depriving her daughter of the benefit she derived from her mother’s wealth and extravagance. Madame Colleville’s house was pleasant enough but desperately expensive.

Between 1816 and 1826 she had five children. Colleville, a musician at night, kept a merchant’s books from seven till nine every morning. By ten he was at the office. And so, by blowing into a wooden pipe in the evening and writing out accounts by double entry in the morning, he made seven or eight thousand francs a year.

Madame Colleville played the real lady; she was ‘at home’ on Wednesdays, she gave a music party once a week, and a dinner once a fortnight. She only saw her husband at dinner; in the evening, when he came in towards midnight, she often had not returned. She was at the play, for she sometimes had a box given her, or she left word for Colleville to fetch her from some house where she was at a dance or a supper.

Madame Colleville’s dinners were excellent, and the company, if mixed, was very amusing; she received distinguished actresses, painters, men of letters, and some men of wealth. Madame Colleville could vie in elegance with Tullia, the famous opera-singer, of whom she saw a great deal; still, though the Collevilles drew on their capital, and often found it difficult to make both ends meet at the end of the month, Flavie never was in debt.

Colleville was very happy; he still loved his wife and was still her great friend. Always welcomed with the same affectionate smile and infectious good spirits, he yielded to her irresistible fascinations and ways.

The exhausting toil he went through in his three separate avocations suited his character and temperament. He was a good-natured, burly fellow, florid, jolly, and lavish, and full of whims. In ten years there was never a squab-

ble in the household. In the office he was regarded as a scatterbrain, like all artists, as they said; but they were superficial judges who mistook the constant haste of a busy man for the hurry of a muddler.

He had sense enough to affect a certain stupidity; he would boast of his domestic happiness, and pretend to be interested in concocting anagrams, as if he were absorbed by a passion for them. The clerks of his division, the heads of divisions, and even heads of offices came to his concerts; from time to time, at fitting moments, he would offer tickets for a play, for he needed much indulgence for his frequent absence from work. Rehearsals took up half the time he ought to have spent at the office, but the musical gifts he had inherited from his father were genuine, and his knowledge great enough to exempt him from any but the general rehearsals. Thanks to Madame Colleville's influence, the theatre and the authorities respectively yielded to the necessities of this worthy pluralist, who, besides all this, was training a young fellow earnestly recommended by his wife, a great musician of the future, who sometimes took his place in the orchestra with every hope of succeeding him.

In point of fact, in 1827, when Colleville retired, the said young man became the first clarinet.

As to Flavie, she was summed up in the sentence: 'She is a bit of a flirt!'

The eldest Colleville child, born in 1816, was the very image of its good father. In 1818 Madame Colleville thought everything of the cavalry, ranking it even above the arts; she smiled on a lieutenant of the Saint-Chamans dragoons, Charles de Gondreville, who was young and rich, and who died afterwards in the Spanish war; her second son, then a baby, was destined to a soldier's life. In 1820 she considered the Bank as the foster-mother of industry and the mainstay of the State, and the great Keller, the famous orator, was her idol. Her third son was born,

François, who was to go into business and would never lack the advantage of Keller's protection. By the end of 1820 Thuillier, Monsieur and Madame Colleville's intimate friend and Flavie's great admirer, felt the need of pouring out his sorrows in that excellent woman's heart, and expatiated on his matrimonial troubles. For six years he had hoped for a child, but God had not blessed his efforts ; in vain did Madame Thuillier have masses said ; she had even been to Notre Dame de Liesse ! He described Céleste under every aspect, and the words ' Poor Thuillier ' fell from Madame Colleville's lips. She, for her part, was just then rather depressed ; she had no predominant opinion. She confided her sorrows to Thuillier. The great Keller, the hero of the Left, was in fact horribly mean ; she had seen the sunny side of glory, the follies of finance, the shallowness of an orator. He never would say a word excepting in the Chamber, and he had behaved very badly to her. Thuillier was indignant.

' Only simpletons know how to love,' said he ; ' take me ! '

And handsome Thuillier was said to be making up to Madame Colleville, paying her attentions, as the phrase was under the Empire.

' So you are sweet on my wife,' said Colleville, laughing. ' You had better beware ; she will leave you in the lurch like all the rest ! '

A cunning speech by which Colleville guarded his marital dignity in the office.

In 1820-1821 Thuillier availed himself of his position as a friend of the family to help Colleville, who had so often helped him of old ; and in the course of eighteen months he had lent the Collevilles nearly ten thousand francs, never intending to mention it. In the spring of 1821 Madame Colleville gave birth to a charming little girl to whom Monsieur and Madame Thuillier stood sponsors ; she was named Céleste Louise Caroline Brigitte ; Mademoiselle Thuillier wished that this angel should bear

one of her names. The name Caroline was given in compliment to Colleville.

Old Madame Lemprun undertook to put the child out to nurse under her own eye at Auteuil, where Céleste and her sister went to see her twice a week.

As soon as Madame Colleville was strong again she said to Thuillier quite frankly and seriously :—

‘ My dear friend, if we are to continue good friends, we must be nothing more. Colleville is greatly attached to you ; well, one in the family is enough.’

‘ Pray tell me,’ said Thuillier to Tullia, the dancer, who was calling on Madame Colleville, ‘ why women are so little attached to me. I am not the Belvidere Apollo, but on the other hand I am not a Vulcan; I am fairly good-looking, I can talk, I am constant — ’

‘ Do you want to know the truth ? ’ asked Tullia.

‘ Yes,’ said handsome Thuillier.

‘ Well, then, though we sometimes love an idiot, we never can love a fool.’

This speech crushed Thuillier ; he could not get over it. He had a fit of melancholy and accused womankind of caprice.

‘ Did not I warn you ? ’ said Colleville ; ‘ I am not a Napoleon, my dear fellow ; I should even be very sorry if I were, but I have my Joséphine — a jewel ! ’

The chief Secretary in her husband’s office, des Lupeaulx, whom Madame Colleville supposed to have more influence than he had — she used to say later : ‘ He was one of my mistakes ’ — was for a time the great man of the Colleville drawing-room ; but as he had not power enough to get Colleville promoted to the division of Bois-Levant, Flavie had wit enough to take umbrage at the attentions he paid Madame Rabourdin, the wife of a head clerk, a minx, as she said, to whose house she had never been invited, and who had twice been so impertinent as not to come to her music parties.

Flavie was dreadfully shocked by young Gondreville's death ; she was quite inconsolable ; she saw in it, she said, the hand of God. In 1824 she mended her ways, talked about economising, received no more company, devoted herself to her children, and set up for being a virtuous wife and mother ; her friends did not know of any favourite in attendance. But she went much to church, she corrected her dress, wearing sober greys ; she talked of religion and the proprieties ; and this mysticism resulted in the birth, in 1825, of a pretty little boy, named Théodore, the gift of God.

In 1826, when the Congregation was all-powerful, Colleville was made second clerk in Clergeot's division, and in 1828 promoted to be revenue collector in a Paris district. Colleville also obtained the Cross of the Legion of Honour, to entitle him, by and by, to have his daughter educated at Saint-Denis. The half-scholarship which Keller had succeeded in getting in 1823 for Charles, the eldest of Colleville's boys, was given to the second ; Charles secured a whole scholarship at the College Saint-Denis, and the third, to whom Madame the Dauphiness extended her protection, had three-quarters of a scholarship at the College Henri IV.

In 1830 Colleville's attachment to the Legitimate branch compelled him to retire ; all his children were happily living. He was so fortunate to be able to get something for his place, a pension of two thousand four hundred francs as the reward of long service and an indemnity of ten thousand francs from his successor ; he was also promoted to be an officer of the Legion of Honour. He nevertheless found himself in straitened circumstances, and in 1832 Mademoiselle Thuillier advised him to settle near them, hinting that he might obtain a clerkship at the Mairie, as, in fact, he did within a fortnight, with a salary of a thousand crowns.

Charles Colleville had just entered the Naval School. The schools to which the other boys went were in the

neighbourhood. The seminary of Saint Sulpice, where the youngest was one day to be educated, was close to the Luxembourg. Finally, Thuillier and Colleville really ought to end their days together.

In 1833 Madame Colleville, now five-and-thirty, settled in the Rue d'Enfer at the corner of the Rue des Deux-Eglises with Céleste and little Théodore; thus Colleville was about equally far from his Mairie and the Rue Saint-Dominique. The family, after leading a life at first of show and dissipation and constant festivities, and then of quiet retirement, was now reduced to middle-class obscurity with a total income of five thousand four hundred francs.

Céleste was now twelve years old; she promised to be pretty; she required masters; she would cost at least two thousand francs a year. Her mother felt that she must be placed under the eye of her godfather and godmother. So she acted on Mademoiselle Thuillier's suggestion, in every way a wise one; and Brigitte, without in any way pledging herself, made Madame Colleville understand pretty clearly that her fortune, with her brother's and Madame Thuillier's, was to be settled on Céleste. The little girl had lived at Auteuil till the age of seven, worshipped by kind old Madame Lemprun, who died in 1829, leaving twenty thousand francs in savings, and her house, which sold for the enormous sum of twenty-eight thousand.

The little girl had seen but little of her mother and a great deal of Madame and Mademoiselle Thuillier since going home to her father's house in 1829. In 1833 she fell more exclusively under Flavie's management, and the mother then tried conscientiously to do her duty, overdoing it indeed, as women do who are tortured by remorse. Flavie, without being hard, was very strict with the little girl; she looked back on her own early training and vowed to herself that she would make an honest woman, and not a light woman, of Céleste. She took her to church and made her take her first communion under the direction of a Paris

curé who has since been made a bishop. Céleste was all the more genuinely pious because Madame Thuillier, her godmother, whom she adored, was a perfect saint. Céleste felt that she was better loved by this poor, lonely woman than by her own mother.

Between 1833 and 1840 she had the most brilliant education, according to the ideas of her world. The best music-masters made her a very tolerable performer; she could wash in a water-colour drawing very neatly; she danced to perfection; she had learned her own language and history, geography, English, Italian—in short, everything that constitutes a ladylike education. Of medium height and rather flat, she was unfortunately short-sighted; neither pretty nor plain, she had a fair, bright complexion, but she had not a notion of fine manners. She had a good deal of restrained feeling, and her godfather, godmother, Mademoiselle Thuillier, and Colleville himself were unanimous on this point—a mother's anchor of hope—that Céleste could feel a strong attachment. One of her chief beauties was magnificent light-brown hair; but her hands and feet showed common blood.

The girl was engaging for her admirable virtues; she was genuinely kind, simple, and sweet; she loved her father and mother, and would have sacrificed herself for them. Brought up in the deepest admiration for her godparents, alike by Brigitte,—who made her call her Aunt Brigitte,—by Madame Thuillier, and by her mother, who was on constantly intimate terms with the old ‘buck’ of the Empire, Céleste had the loftiest ideas of the retired second clerk. The house in the Rue Saint-Dominique impressed her as much as the Château of the Tuileries impresses a courtier of the new dynasty.

Thuillier had not withstood the rolling-mill action of administrative routine which wears the brains thin in proportion as they are beaten out. Exhausted by monotonous work as well as by his successes as a ‘lady's man,’ he had

lost his best faculties by the time he settled in the Rue Saint-Dominique ; but his drawn features, bearing a slightly arrogant expression mixed with the self-satisfaction that might have been the fatuity of a superior clerk, made the deepest impression on Céleste. She alone adored that colourless face. She knew that she was the delight of the Thuillier household.

The Collevilles and their children very naturally formed the nucleus of the society which Mademoiselle Thuillier's ambition aimed at collecting about her brother. A retired clerk of la Billardière's division, who had for thirty years been living in the Saint-Jacques quarter of the city, Monsieur Phellion, now a major of the National Guard, was recognised at the first review by the retired collector and second clerk. Phellion was one of the most highly respected men in the district. He had one daughter, formerly a teacher in the Lagrave school for girls, and now married to Monsieur Barniol, a professor in the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe.

Phellion's eldest son was mathematical master in a public school. He gave lessons, coached pupils, and devoted himself, as his father expressed it, to pure mathematics. The second son was studying in the Civil Engineering College.

Phellion had a pension of nine hundred francs, and a few hundred francs of interest on his savings and his wife's during thirty years of hard work and privations. He was also the owner of the little house, with a garden attached, in which he lived in the Impasse des Feuillantines. In thirty years he had never once spoken of this alley, which was no thoroughfare, by the old-fashioned term, *cul-de-sac*.

Dutocq, clerk to a justice of the peace, had been an employé in the Exchequer office. He had been the victim on one of those occasions which now and then are a necessity under a representative government, and had con-

sented to be the scapegoat in a scandalous case discovered by the commissioners of the budget, for which he was secretly paid a fairly round sum ; this had enabled him to purchase his place as a clerk of the Court. This man, whose credit was low as an office spy, was not received as he thought was his due by the Thuilliers ; but the coldness of his landlord was just what made him persist in his visits.

He was unmarried, and indulged his vices ; he carefully concealed his mode of life and knew how to flatter his superiors. The magistrate, his master, had a high opinion of Dutocq. This shameless individual made himself tolerated by the Thuilliers by mean and gross adulation, which never fails of its effect. He knew every detail of Thuillier's life, of his intimacy with Colleville, and yet more with Madame Colleville. They were afraid of that formidable tongue, and the Thuilliers endured him without admitting him to familiarity.

The family that presently became the flower of the Thuilliers' drawing-room was that of a poor clerk who had been the object of pity in the office, and who, driven by penury, had thrown up his place in 1827 to go into trade — with an idea.

Minard foresaw a fortune in one of those atrocious devices which disgrace French trade, but which in 1827 had not yet been blown on by publicity. Minard bought tea and mixed it with dried tea-leaves that had already been used ; then he adulterated chocolate to an extent that allowed of his selling it cheap. This retail business in colonial produce, first started in the Saint-Marcel quarter, set Minard up in trade ; he established a factory, and through his connections was now able to procure the unmanufactured article from the producer ; thus he could carry on honestly and on an extensive scale the business he had begun in such a shady way.

He set up a distillery ; vast quantities of imported raw material passed through his hands, and in 1835 he was

considered to be one of the richest traders in the neighbourhood of the Place Maubert. He had bought one of the handsomest residences in the Rue des Maçons Sorbonne ; he had already been the deputy mayor, and in 1839 was elected mayor of that district and assessor of the Chamber of Commerce. He kept a carriage and had a country house near Lagny ; his wife wore diamonds at the Court balls, and he flaunted the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole.

Minard and his wife were moreover exceedingly liberal to the poor ; perhaps they wished to restore to them retail all they extracted wholesale from the public.

Phellion, Colleville, and Thuillier came across Minard at election time, and the result was an acquaintance which soon became intimate because Madame Zélie Minard seemed enchanted to introduce her ‘young lady’ to Céleste Colleville.

Céleste made her entry into society at the age of sixteen and a half, at a fine ball given by the Minards, dressed as beseeemed her name, which seemed of good augury for her life. Delighted to be the friend of Mademoiselle Minard, who was four years her senior, she persuaded her godfather and her father to cultivate the Minards, in whose gilded and gorgeous rooms many political celebrities of the ‘*Juste Milieu*’ (the Happy Medium) were wont to meet : Monsieur Popinot, afterwards Minister of Commerce ; Cochu, now Baron Cochu, previously a clerk in the Clergeot division of the Exchequer office, and a large shareholder in a grocery business, was as much the oracle of the Lombards and the Bourdonnais quarters as his ally, Monsieur Anselme Popinot.

Minard’s eldest son was a pleader, whose ambition it was to step into the shoes of those advocates whose political opinions should have weaned them from appearing in Court since 1830 ; he was the genius of the family, and his mother, no less than his father, hoped to see him well married.

Zélie Minard, once an artificial-flower maker, was filled with an ardent yearning towards higher social spheres, and hoped to enter there by the marriage of her son and daughter; while Minard, more prudent than his wife, and imbued with a sense of the power of the middle classes in the state which had resulted from the revolution of July, looked only for fortune. He haunted the Thuilliers' house to pick up information as to Céleste's prospects as an heiress.

He, like Dutocq and Phellion, had heard the scandal that had been rumoured as to the Thuilliers' intimacy with Flavie, and he had not failed to note their devotion to their goddaughter.

Dutocq, eager to be received by the Minards, toadied them grossly. When Minard, the Rothschild of his *arrondissement*, came first to the Thuilliers', he compared him, almost wittily, to Napoleon, seeing him now burly, fat, and flourishing, when he had last known him, in the office, lean, pale, and sickly.

'When you were in la Billardière's division,' said he, 'you were like Napoleon before the 18th *Brumaire*; now I see a Napoleon of the Empire.'

Minard, however, met him coldly and did not ask him to his house; thus he made a mortal enemy of the malignant law clerk.

Monsieur and Madame Phellion, worthy couple as they were, could not help indulging in calculations and hopes. It struck them that Céleste was the very thing for their son, the professor; so, to make a little faction in the Thuillier drawing-room, they introduced their son-in-law, Monsieur Barniol, a man well thought of in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, an official of long standing in the Mairie, and their intimate ally, whom Colleville had in a way ousted from his place, when Monsieur Leudigeois, for twenty years a clerk in the Mairie, was hoping, as the reward of his long services, for the secretaryship obtained by Colleville.

Thus the Phellions formed a phalanx of seven, all fairly faithful to each other; the Colleville faction was not less numerous, so that sometimes, on a Sunday, there would be not less than thirty persons in the Thuilliers' drawing-room. Thuillier renewed his acquaintance with the Sail-lards, the Baudoyers, and the Falleix, all people of importance in the Place Royale quarter, and frequently invited them to dinner.

Among the women Madame Colleville was the most important personage of this circle, as the younger Minard and Phellion, the professor, were its superior men; for all the rest, men devoid of ideas or culture and risen from the lower ranks, were typical of the absurdities of the inferior middle classes. Although a fortune made in the past seems to imply some form of merit, Minard was but an inflated balloon. He overflowed in long-drawn sentences, took obsequiousness for politeness and ready-made phrases for wit, and would utter commonplaces with such airs and mouthing as got them accepted as eloquence. A certain set of words which mean nothing and answer every purpose — progress, steam, asphalt, the National Guard, order, democratic influences, coöperative spirit, legality, motion and resistance, intimidation — seemed at every political crisis to have been invented for Minard, who then paraphrased the text of his newspaper.

Julien Minard, the lawyer, suffered under his father as much as his father suffered under his wife. Zélie, in fact, with improved fortunes, had assumed pretensions, though she could never learn to speak her own language; she had grown fat, and in her handsome attire she looked like a cook married to her master.

Phellion, the very ideal of a middle-class citizen, had an equal share of virtues and absurdities. As a subordinate, during his official career, he held social superiority in high respect. He kept silence in the presence of Minard. He had weathered the crisis of superannuation very successfully,

and this was how. The worthy man had never had a chance of indulging his tastes. His love was for the city of Paris ; he took the utmost interest in the new streets and improvements ; he was the man to stand for two hours on end in front of a house that was being pulled down. He might be seen planted squarely on his feet, his nose in the air, watching for the fall of a stone that a mason was dislodging with a crowbar from the top of a wall, never budging till the block came down ; and when all was over he would go off as pleased as an academician at the damning of a romantic play. Such men — Phellion, Leudigeois, and the like, the true supernumeraries of the world's stage — fill the place of the antique chorus. They weep when others weep, laugh when they are expected to laugh, and sing in chorus over public disasters and public rejoicings, exulting where they stand apart at the victories of Algiers, Constantine, Lisbon, and Saint Juan de Ulloa ; grieving impartially over the death of Napoleon and the fatal disasters of Saint-Merri and the Rue Transnonnain ; mourning for the famous men of whom they know least.

Phellion, however, showed two faces ; he was conscientiously divided between the reasoning of the opposition and that of the government. But if there was any street fighting, Phellion was brave enough to declare himself in the face of the neighbours ; he went forth to the Place Saint-Michel, the parade-ground of his regiment ; he pitied the government, but he did his duty. Before and during a riot he would support the reigning dynasty, the outcome of the revolution of July ; but when the political trials came on he was on the side of the culprits.

These weather-cock opinions, harmless enough, also pervaded his political views : the 'Colossus of the North' was answerable for everything ; England, like the old *Constitutionnel* newspaper, was in his arguments a stalking-horse on both sides, and by turn 'Machiavellian Albion' and a model country, — Machiavellian with regard to the insulted

interests of France and Napoleon ; a model country when the French government was to be criticised. Agreeing with the newspaper, he recognised the democratic element, but in conversation he would come to no terms with the Republican Spirit — the ‘Republican Spirit’ meaning 1793, the Revolution, the Reign of Terror, the agrarian law; the Democratic Element being the development of the middle classes — the reign of Phellion.

This excellent old man was always dignified ; dignity was the keyword of his life. He brought up his children with dignity ; he was always the father in their eyes ; he insisted on being respected at home, as he honoured power and the authorities. He never had a debt. On a jury his conscience made him sweat blood and water while following the debates on a trial, and he never laughed, not even when the Court laughed, and the bench, and the public authorities. Always ready to oblige, he would give care, time, everything but money.

Félix Phellion, his son, the professor, was his idol ; he believed him capable of winning a seat in the Academy of Sciences.

Thuillier, between the impudent stupidity of Minard and the blunt imbecility of Phellion, was like a neutral element, but there was something of both in him from his melancholy experience. He hid the vacuity of his brain under the commonplace, just as he covered the parchment skin of his head under the thin wisps of grey hair that were artfully brought over from the back by the hairdresser’s comb.

‘In any other walk of life,’ he would say, speaking of official work, ‘I should have made infinitely more money.’

He had seen what was right and possible in theory and impossible in practice ; he had seen results contradict the premises ; he would relate all the injustice and intrigues of the Rabourdin affair.

‘After that,’ he would say, ‘what is one to believe ?

everything or nothing? A very queer thing is government, and I am happy in not having a son, so that I cannot see him going through the rush for place.'

Colleville, always cheerful, jovial, good-fellow-well-met, always joking and inventing anagrams, always in a bustle, the typical citizen meddler and mocker, represented ability that cannot succeed, and persistent hard work without any result, but also a sort of rollicking resignation, narrow views, art wasted — for he was a capital musician, and now no longer played but to please his daughter.

So the Thuilliers' drawing-room was a sort of provincial *Salon*, lighted up by reflections from the perpetual Paris glare; its mediocrity and platitude kept pace behind the torrent of the age. The word and the thing in fashion — for in Paris the word and the thing are like the horse and its rider — were never felt there but by a ricochet. Monsieur Minard was impatiently awaited as a man who, on great occasions, would certainly know the truth.

The women of the Thuillier circle were all for the Jesuits; the men defended the University; generally the women were content to listen. A man of any wit, if he could have endured the tedium of these evenings, would have laughed as heartily as at a comedy by Molière to hear a long discussion ending in some such speech as this:—

‘Could the Revolution of 1789 have been averted? Louis XIV.’s loans had prepared the way for it. Louis XV., an egoist, a man devoted to ceremonial — (it was he who said, “If I were at the head of the Police I would prohibit cabriolets”), a dissolute king (you know all about his *Parc aux Cerfs*), contributed largely to open the yawning gulf of revolution. Monsieur de Necker, a malignant Genevese, gave the last shock. Foreigners have always owed France a grudge. The *Maximum* did infinite mischief. In equity Louis XVI. ought not to have been condemned; a jury would have acquitted him. Why was Charles X. overthrown? Napoleon was a great man and the details that

prove his genius belong to the domain of anecdote : he would take five pinches of snuff per minute, and kept it loose in his waistcoat pockets, which were lined with leather. He looked over all the bills ; he used to go to the Rue Saint-Denis to learn the price of things. Talma was his friend ; Talma taught him all his gestures, and yet he always refused to give Talma the Legion of Honour. The Emperor once stood sentry for a soldier who had fallen asleep, and so saved him from being shot. Such things as that made his men adore him. Louis XVIII., though he was a clever man, showed a great want of justice towards him when he called him Monsieur de Bonaparte. The fault of the present government is that, instead of leading, it submits to be led. It has taken its stand too low ; it is afraid of men of energy ; it ought to have torn the treaties of 1815 across and demanded the Rhine of Europe. They shift the same men too often in the ministry.'

'There, you have been clever enough for one time,' Mademoiselle Thuillier would say at the end of these brilliant reflections. 'The altar is prepared ; come and play your little game.'

And the old maid always closed these discussions, which bored the women, by making this suggestion.

If all these facts and generalisations had not been given by way of 'argument' to afford an idea of the setting of this drama and the spirit of this little world, the drama itself would perhaps have suffered. The sketch is historically accurate, and depicts a social stratum of no small importance in the chronicle of manners, especially when we remember that the youngest branch of the dynasty took it for its fulcrum.

The winter of 1839 was, in some ways, the culminating hour of glory for the Thuilliers' salon. The Minards appeared there almost every Sunday ; they began by spend-

ing an hour there when they were obliged to go on to other friends, and then Minard commonly left his wife there, taking his daughter with him and his eldest son, the lawyer. This constant civility on the Minards' part was the direct outcome of a meeting, long postponed, between Métivier, Barbet, and Minard, one evening when these two important tenants had remained later than usual to chat with Mademoiselle Thuillier. Minard then heard from Barbet that the old maid took from him about thirty thousand francs in bills at six months, at seven and a half per cent per annum; and that she took as much paper from Métivier, so that she must have at least a hundred and eighty thousand francs in her hands.

'I lend on books at twelve per cent and take none but the best names; nothing can suit me better,' said Barbet in conclusion. 'I say she must have a hundred and eighty thousand francs, for she can only give bills at ninety days at the Bank.'

'Then she has an account at the Bank?'

'I think so,' said Barbet.

Minard, who had a friend on the Board, learnt that Mademoiselle Thuillier had an account there to the extent of about two hundred thousand francs, guaranteed by a deposit of forty shares. This security, it was added, was in fact unnecessary; the Bank would be willing to oblige a person so well known there, and the responsible manager for Céleste Lemprun, the daughter of a clerk who had seen as many years' service as the Bank had existed. In twenty years Mademoiselle Brigitte had never overdrawn her account. She always paid in sixty thousand francs a month in bills at three months, which came to about a hundred and sixty thousand. The securities in shares deposited represented a hundred and twenty thousand francs; there was therefore no risk, for the bills were always worth sixty thousand francs. 'Indeed,' the bank director said, 'if she should, in the third month, send us in a hundred thousand

francs' worth of bills we would not refuse one. She has a house of her own which is not mortgaged and is worth more than a hundred thousand francs. And all the bills come through Barbet or Métivier, and have four names on the back including hers.'

'Why does Mademoiselle Thuillier work so hard? Minard asked Métivier. 'Why, she is the very wife for you,' he added.

'Oh, I can do better by marrying one of my cousins,' said Métivier. 'My Uncle Métivier has promised me the good-will of his concern; he has a hundred thousand francs a year in the funds, and only two daughters.'

However secret Mademoiselle Thuillier might be, saying nothing to anybody of her investments; and although she absorbed into one lump sum all she saved out of Madame Thuillier's fortune as well as her own, it was hardly possible but that a ray of light should at last pierce through the bushel under which she hid her treasure.

Dutocq, who was always with Barbet — and there was more than one point of resemblance in their characters and physiognomy, — had estimated the Thuilliers' savings more accurately than Minard, at a hundred and fifty thousand francs in 1838, and he could secretly keep a keen eye on their increase by calculating the profits by the help of Barbet, a practised discounter.

'Céleste will have two hundred thousand francs from us, money down,' said the old maid in confidence to Barbet, 'and Madame Thuillier will settle on her at her marriage the reversion of all her property. My will is made. My brother will have a life-interest in everything, but Céleste will have the reversion. Monsieur Cardot, my lawyer, is my executor.'

Mademoiselle Thuillier had then persuaded her brother to renew his old acquaintanceship with the Saillards, the Baudoyers, and the Falleix, who held a position analogous to that of the Thuilliers and the Minards, in the Saint-

Antoine quarter, where Monsieur Saillard was mayor of the district.

Cardot, the notary, had introduced a suitor for the hand of Céleste in the person of Maître Godeschal, attorney at law, and Derville's successor, a man of six and thirty, a very clever fellow, who had paid a hundred thousand francs on account for his connection, a debt which two hundred thousand francs with his wife would clear off. But Minard got rid of Godeschal by telling Mademoiselle Thuillier that Céleste's sister-in-law would be the famous opera-dancer, Mariette.

'She came out of that,' said Colleville, speaking of his wife, 'and has no idea of going back again.'

'Besides, Monsieur Godeschal is too old for Céleste,' said Brigitte.

'And then,' Madame Thuillier suggested timidly, 'ought we not to allow her to marry a man of her own choice and to be happy?'

The good woman had discerned in Félix Phellion a true affection for Céleste—love such as a woman might have dreamed of, who had been crushed by Brigitte and hurt by Thuillier's indifference, for he cared no more for his wife than for one of the servant-girls; love, bold at heart but shy on the surface, strong in itself but timid, concentrated before men and expanding in the skies. At three and twenty Félix Phellion was a gentle, simple-minded man, as learned men are who cultivate knowledge for its own sake. He had been wholesomely brought up by his father, who, taking everything very seriously, had set him a good example in all respects, supporting it by trivial axioms. He was a youth of medium height, with light, chestnut-brown hair, grey eyes, and a much-freckled complexion; his voice was charming, his demeanour quiet, his manner rather dreamy; he gesticulated very little, never talked nonsense, contradicted nobody, and was incapable of a sordid thought or a selfish speculation.

'That is the sort of man I should have liked my husband to be !' Madame Thuillier had often said to herself.

One evening in the month of February, 1840, the various persons whose figures have just been sketched were assembled in the Thuilliers' drawing-room. It was near the end of the month. Métivier and Barbet, who each wanted to borrow thirty thousand francs from Mademoiselle Thuillier, were playing whist with Phellion and Monsieur Minard. At another table sat Julien — 'Julien the Advocate,' as Colleville called the younger Minard — Madame Colleville, Monsieur Barniol, and Madame Phellion. A game of *bouillotte*, at five sous points, engaged the attention of Madame Minard, who knew no other game, of Colleville, old Saillard, and his son-in-law, Baudoyer. Leudigeois and Dutocq looked on to cut in in the place of the losers ; Mesdames Falleix, Baudoyer, and Barniol were playing boston with Mademoiselle Minard ; Céleste and Prudence Minard were sitting together. Young Phellion, while listening to Madame Thuillier, could gaze at Céleste.

At the other side of the fireplace the Queen Elizabeth of the family sat enthroned, as plainly dressed as when she was thirty, for prosperity could not make her alter any of her habits. On her chinchilla-grey hair she wore a black gauze cap with a spray of *Charles X.* geranium flowers ; her gown of plum-red stuff had cost perhaps fifteen francs ; an embroidered collar worth six francs scarcely covered the deep hollow left between the muscles that attach the head to the spine. Monvel, when he acted the part of Augustus in his later days, had not a sterner profile than this autocrat who sat knitting socks for her brother.

In front of the fire stood Thuillier, ready to receive all newcomers, and by his side stood a young man who had produced a great effect when the porter, arrayed on Sundays in his best coat to play the man-servant, announced 'Monsieur Olivier Vinet.'

A confidential hint from Cardot to the famous public prosecutor, the young lawyer's father, had led to this visit. Olivier Vinet had just been promoted from the assize court of Arcis-sur-Aube to a place in Paris as the attorney-general's deputy. Cardot, the notary, had invited Thuillier to dinner to meet the public prosecutor, who seemed likely to be made Minister of Justice, and his son. Cardot estimated the present value of the money to be left to Céleste at seven hundred thousand francs at least. Vinet junior had seemed delighted at the prospect of being admitted as a Sunday guest at the Thuilliers'. Large fortunes lead to great and unblushing follies nowadays.

Ten minutes later, another young man who was talking to Thuillier before Vinet's arrival raised his voice in the heat of a vehement political discussion, compelling the lawyer to do the same in the eagerness of the debate. The subject in question was the vote which had led to the overthrow by the lower Chamber of the Ministry of the 12th May, by their refusal to grant the sum of money asked for the Duc de Nemours.

'I am most decidedly very far from being an adherent of the dynastic view,' said this young man, 'and I am far from approving the advent to power of the citizen class. The middle classes have no more right now to exclusive preëminence in the state than the aristocracy had of old. However, the French middle classes took upon themselves to create a new dynasty, a royal family of their own, and this is how they treat it! When the nation allowed Napoleon to raise himself, he created, with himself, a magnificent and monumental edifice; he was proud of its greatness, and generously spent his blood and the sweat of his brow to constitute the Empire. The citizen classes, between the splendours of aristocratic sovereignty and of the Imperial purple, are squalid; they drag down the powers that be to their own level instead of rising to them. They practise the same economy of candle-ends on their princes as they do

in their back-shops ; but what is a virtue there is a blunder and a crime in high places. There are many things I could desire for the people, but I would not have cut ten millions off the new civil list. The citizen class, now that it is almost all-powerful in France, ought to secure the happiness of the people,—splendour without lavishness and grandeur without privilege.'

Olivier Vinet's father was at that time out of conceit with the government : the robes of a Keeper of the Seals, his great ambition, had not yet fallen on his shoulders. So the young deputy judge did not know what to answer, and he thought it would be wise to take up one side of the question.

' You are right, Monsieur,' said he. ' But before it thinks of display the citizen class has a duty to the country. The luxury of which you speak comes after duty. The decision you think so wrong was a necessity at the moment. the Chamber is far from having its fair share of influence ; the Ministers work less for France than for the Crown, and Parliament wished to see a Ministry which, as in England, had a power of its own, not a mere borrowed weight. As soon as the Ministry acts independently, and represents the Chamber of Commons in the executive power of the country, as the Chamber represents the people, Parliament will be very liberal to the Crown. That is the marrow of the matter, and I merely state it without any expression of personal opinion, since my duty in my office requires a sort of fealty to the Sovereign in political questions.'

' Apart from the political question,' replied the other, whose accent betrayed him as a son of Provence, ' it cannot be disputed that the middle classes have misunderstood their task. We see public prosecutors, presidents of the law courts, peers of the upper Chamber riding in omnibuses, judges living on their salaries, préfets without any private means, Ministers in debt. Now the citizen class, having taken possession of all these places, ought to do

honour to them, as the aristocracy did ; and instead of holding them as a means to making a fortune, as many scandalous trials have proved, they should fill them with dignity and due expenditure — ’

‘ Who can this young fellow be ? ’ Olivier Vinet wondered as he listened. ‘ Is he a relation ? Cardot really ought to have come with me the first time.’

‘ Who is that little man ? ’ Minard asked Barbet. ‘ I have seen him here several times.’

‘ A tenant,’ replied Métivier, dealing the cards.

‘ An advocate,’ said Barbet, in an undertone. ‘ He has small rooms on the third floor, to the front. Oh ! he is no great things, and he has no money.’

‘ What is that young man’s name ? ’ Vinet inquired of Thuillier.

‘ Théodore de la Peyrade, an advocate,’ whispered Thuillier in reply.

At this moment, every one, men and women alike, were looking at the two young men, and Madame Minard could not help saying to Colleville : —

‘ He is a very good-looking young fellow.’

‘ I have made an anagram of his name,’ said Céleste’s papa, ‘ and the letters of Charles Marie Théodore de la Peyrade spell this prophecy : *Eh, Monsieur payera de la dot, des oies et le char.* — Take care, my dear Madame Minard, not to give him your daughter ! ’

‘ People think that young fellow better looking than my son,’ said Madame Phellion to Madame Colleville. ‘ What do you think ? ’

‘ Oh, so far as looks go,’ replied Madame Colleville, ‘ a woman might hesitate before making a choice.’

At this stage Olivier Vinet, looking round at this roomful of middle-class citizens, thought it would be clever to try up the class, and he threw himself into agreement with the young Provençal, saying that the men who enjoyed the confidence of the Government ought certainly to imitate

the King, whose splendour far surpassed that of the old Court; and that to try to save out of the emoluments of an appointment was monstrous. Besides, how was it possible in Paris, where everything cost three times as much as of old, where, for instance, rooms fit for a judge to live in cost three thousand francs in rent?

‘My father,’ said he in conclusion, ‘allows me a thousand crowns a year, and with my salary I can scarcely make both ends meet decently.’ As the young lawyer cantered off on this treacherous ground, the Provençal, who had so ingeniously led him up to it, gave Dutocq an undetected wink just as he was about to take his turn at the game of *bouillotte*.

‘And there is such a demand for places,’ said Dutocq, ‘that there is some talk of appointing two magistrates to each *arrondissement*, so as to have twelve more courts. As if they could tamper with our dues, with our offices so exorbitantly paid for! ’

‘I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing you speak in Court,’ said Vinet to Monsieur de la Peyrade.

‘I am the advocate of the poor. I only plead in the lower courts,’ replied the Provençal.

On hearing the young lawyer’s views as to the necessity for spending one’s income, Mademoiselle Thuillier had assumed a primly ceremonious look, of which the Provençal and Dutocq well knew the meaning. Vinet presently left, with Minard and Julien, so that the field of battle in front of the hearth was left to la Peyrade and Dutocq.

‘The upper citizen class,’ said Dutocq to Thuillier, ‘will act as the aristocracy were wont to act. The nobility looked for rich girls to improve their lands; the parvenus of to-day want handsome settlements to feather their nest.’

‘Just what Monsieur Thuillier was saying this morning,’ said the Provençal with bold mendacity.

‘Vinet’s father,’ replied Dutocq, ‘married a *Démoiselle de Chargebœuf* and has assumed aristocratic opinions; he

must have money at any cost; his wife keeps up a princely style.'

'Oh!' said Thuillier, roused to the envy of his class of each other, 'turn such folks out of their places, and down they go to the mud they rose from!'

Mademoiselle Thuillier was knitting at such a pace that she might have been a machine driven by steam.

'Now you come in, Monsieur Dutocq,' said Madame Minard, rising. 'My feet are cold,' she added, coming to the fire, the gold tinsel in her turban twinkling like fireworks in the light of the hanging lamp that vainly strove to illuminate the spacious room.

'He is but an innocent—that sucking judge,' said Madame Minard, glancing at Mademoiselle Thuillier.

'An innocent! did you say?' observed la Peyrade. 'That, Madame, is very witty—'

'But we are used to hearing witty things from Madame Minard!' said 'handsome Thuillier.'

Madame Colleville was studying the Provençal, and comparing him with young Phellion, who was talking to Céleste, neither of them noticing what was going on around them. And this is certainly a good opportunity for describing the singular man who was destined to play an important part in the Thuilliers' circle, and who certainly deserves to be called a great actor.

There is in Provence, and especially in the river-port of Avignon, a race of men with fair or chestnut-brown hair, delicate complexion, and almost weak eyes, their expression being soft, calm, and languishing, rather than fiery, eager, and deep, as the eyes of Southerners so commonly are. It may be observed incidentally that among the Corsicans, a race peculiarly subject to fits of fury and dangerous rages, fair men are often to be seen, of apparently passive character. These fair-complexioned men, apt to be stout, with a somewhat watery eye, greenish or blue, are the worst kind

of Provençal, and Charles Marie Théodore de la Peyrade was a good specimen of the type whose constitution would repay careful study from the point of view of medical science and philosophical physiology. There is in them a sort of bile, a bitter gall, easily stirred, which mounts to their brain and makes them capable of the fiercest deeds, done apparently in cold blood. This obscure violence, the result of a sort of spontaneous intoxication, is irreconcilable with their almost lymphatic exterior and the tranquillity of their benign expression.

Young la Peyrade, born near Avignon, was of medium height and well proportioned if rather stout; his complexion was dull — not livid, not pale, not florid, but gelatinous, for that is the only word that can give a clear idea of the soft colourless material that covered sinews not indeed vigorous but capable of immense endurance under certain conditions; his eyes, coldly blue, commonly wore a deceptive expression of melancholy which had, no doubt, a great charm for women. His well-shaped forehead did not lack nobleness, and was agreeably finished by fine, light chestnut hair, thin, and with a very slight natural curl at the ends. His nose, exactly like that of a sporting dog, broad, cleft at the tip, inquisitive, intelligent, prying, always on the alert, had no touch of good-nature, but was ironical and sarcastic; but this side of his nature was rarely seen; it was only when he was off his guard and flew into a rage that the young man found it in him to vent the wit and satire that envenomed his diabolical jesting.

His lips, cut in a pleasing curve and as red as a pomegranate flower, were the marvellous instrument of a voice of which the medium tones were almost musical, and Théodore generally spoke in that register; the higher notes rang out like a gong. That falsetto was indeed the voice of his nerves, of his anger. His face, resolutely expressionless, was oval in shape; and his manner, in harmony with the priestly calm of his features, was stamped with reserve

and propriety. At the same time there was a smooth gentleness in his demeanour ; and without being servile or wheedling, it had a certain attraction which it was difficult to account for in his absence. Charm, when it has its source in feeling, leaves a deep impression ; but when it is the outcome of artifice, like spurious eloquence, it enjoys but a temporary triumph ; it strives for effect at any cost. But how many philosophers are there in the world who can compare and judge ? By the time ordinary people have discovered the way it is done, the trick is played — to use a vulgar phrase.

Everything in this youth of seven and twenty was in harmony with the part and character he had assumed ; he carried out his natural bent by cultivating philanthropy, the only expression that can account for philanthropists. Théodore loved the populace ; for he particularised his love of humanity. Just as the horticulturists devote themselves to roses, dahlias, pinks, or geraniums, caring nothing for any species which is not their special hobby, this young la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt was the slave of the workmen, the poorest classes, the paupers of the Saint-Jacques and Saint-Marceau quarters. The capable men, genius at bay, the decent poor of the middle class, he would not admit into Charity's fold.

In all maniacs the heart is very like the boxes with divisions in which sugar-plums are packed in sorted colours. *Suum cuique tribuere* is their motto. They dole out duty by measure. There are philanthropists who have pity only on the sins of condemned criminals. Vanity, of course, is at the root of philanthropy, but in our Provençal it was deliberate calculation, a part to be played, a form of hypocrisy, liberal and democratic, and affected with such perfection as no actor could achieve. He did not attack the rich ; he was content simply not to understand them, to suffer them to exist ; every man, according to him, must enjoy the fruit of his labours. He had been, he would own, a fer-

vent disciple of Saint-Simon, but this was an error to be ascribed to his extreme youth; modern society could only be based on heredity.

Like all the natives of his province he was a devout churchman; he attended early Mass, and concealed his piety. He was sordidly parsimonious, as almost all philanthropists are, and gave nothing to the poor but his time, his advice, his eloquence, and such money as he could wring for them from the wealthy.

He wore boots, and dressed in black, which he wore till the seams were white.

Nature had greatly favoured Théodore by not bestowing on him that refined and manly beauty of the South, which leads the world to imaginary demands, such as it is more than difficult for any man to fulfil. He found it so easy to please, that, as the mood prompted him, he could be delightfully attractive or quite commonplace.

Never before, since his introduction to the Thuilliers, had he ventured to raise his voice and assume such a magisterial air as he had done this evening to Olivier Vinet; but perhaps Théodore de la Peyrade had not been sorry to try to get out of the shade he had hitherto sat in; besides, it was necessary to shake off this young deputy judge, just as the Minards had previously got rid of Godeschal, the attorney. Like all superior men — for he did not lack intellect — Vinet had not stooped low enough to discern the threads of these vulgar spiders' webs, and had rushed like a fly, head foremost, into the almost invisible snare into which Théodore had drawn him by such wiliness as a cleverer man than Olivier might not have suspected.

To finish this portrait of the ‘advocate of the poor’ it will be well to relate the beginnings of his intimacy with the Thuilliers.

Théodore had come to Paris towards the end of 1837; he had been practising as an attorney for five years, and he now went through his terms to become a pleader; but

some unrevealed circumstances, as to which he was silent, had hindered him from getting his name duly registered in Paris, and he still ranked as a licentiate. However, having established himself in his little rooms on the third floor, with the furniture indispensable to the practice of his noble profession — for the order of advocates will not recognise a new Brother if he has not a suitable office, a library, and all things seemly and ostensible — Théodore de la Peyrade became a pleader at the Court of Assize in Paris.

The whole of the year 1838 was devoted to effecting this change of position, and he led a perfectly regular life. In the morning he studied at home till dinner-time, occasionally going into Court to listen to important cases. Having made friends with Dutocq — with great difficulty as Dutocq declared, — he helped certain poor folks in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, whom Dutocq recommended to his charity, by arguing their cases; he secured them the interest of solicitors, who, in accordance with the statutes of their association, take it in turns to defend the cause of the impecunious; and by never taking any but perfectly secure cases he won them all. Thus making a connection with

few solicitors he became known to his fellow-pleaders by these praiseworthy efforts, so that a certain degree of notoriety attended his admission first to the debating society of his fellow-pleaders, and then as a registered member of the Paris bar. After that he was the regular advocate of the poor in the lower courts, and always the protector of the common people.

His humble clients expressed their gratitude and admiration in the porters' lodges in spite of the young lawyer's injunctions, and a good many facts were carried up to the masters. The Thuilliers, delighted to have so excellent and charitable a man as a tenant, were eager to attract him a visitor, and questioned Dutocq about him. Dutocq spoke in the tone of the envious, and, while doing the young man justice, he added that he was singularly parsimo-

nious, though that indeed might be the effect of his poverty.

‘I have, however, made inquiries about him. He belongs to the de la Peyrades, an old family of the County of Avignon ; he came to Paris at the end of 1829 to find an uncle who was supposed to have a large fortune ; he finally discovered this relative’s residence three days after the old man’s death, and the sale of the furniture just sufficed to pay the funeral expenses and debts. Some friend of this very inefficient uncle presented the fortune-seeking youth with a hundred louis, advising him to study for the bar and to aim at the higher walks of the law. On those hundred louis he lived for more than three years in Paris, faring like an anchorite ; but as he could never see nor trace his unknown benefactor, by 1833 he was in the greatest distress.

‘Then, like all licentiates of law, he dabbled in politics and literature, and supported himself for some time just above utter misery ; for he had nothing to look for from his family, as his father, the youngest brother of the uncle who died in the Rue des Moineaux, has eleven children, all living on a small property called Canquoëlles.

‘He finally got on the staff of a ministerial journal edited by the famous Cérizet, so well known for the persecution he endured at the time of the Restoration for his liberal views, while the men of the Left cannot now forgive him for having gone over to the ministerialists. Since in these days the authorities do little enough to protect even their most devoted adherents, as was seen in the case of Gisquet, the republicans succeeded at last in ruining Cérizet. This is merely to account for Cérizet’s now being a copying clerk in my office.

‘Well, at the time when he was still flourishing, as the editor of a newspaper controlled by the Perier Ministry in antagonism to such incendiary papers as the *Tribune* and others, Cérizet—who is really a very good fellow, only too fond of women, good living, and dissipation—was very

helpful to Théodore, who did the political articles; and but for Casimir-Perier's death the young lawyer would have been appointed deputy judge in Paris. In 1834-1835 he was again in very low water, in spite of his talents, for his employment on a ministerial paper told against him. "But for my religious principles," he said to me at that time, "I should have thrown myself into the river."

'At last it would seem that his uncle's friend heard that he was in want; money enough was sent to him to enable him to pass as a pleader; but even now he knows neither the name of his mysterious patron nor his place of residence. After all, in such circumstances thrift is excusable, and a man must have a great deal of character to refuse the payment offered by the poor devils whose causes he gains by his assistance. It is disgraceful to see men speculating on the impossibility for the poor of standing the costs of an action unjustly brought. Yes, he will get on! I should not be surprised to see that young fellow rise to a brilliant position. He is tenacious, honest, and courageous. He studies—studies hard.'

In spite of the favour with which he was welcomed, Maître la Peyrade did not go too often to the Thuilliers, at first. Taxed with reserve, he went more frequently, and at last was a regular Sunday visitor, invited to all their dinners, and so intimate in their house that if he happened to call on Thuillier at about four o'clock he was always kept to share pot-luck, without ceremony, and Mademoiselle Thuillier would say to herself:—

'Then we are sure of his having a good meal, poor young man!'

A social phenomenon, which must certainly have been observed, but which has not yet been formulated and published, though it deserves to be recorded, is a return to the habits, jokes, and manners of their original state in life in certain folks, who from youth to age have raised themselves above it. Thus, in mind and manners, Thuillier had re-

lapsed into the porter's son ; he would repeat his father's jests, and at last, in his declining years, allowed some of the mud of his early youth to come to the surface.

About five or six times a year, when the soup was good, he would say, as if it were quite a new remark, as he placed his spoon in the empty plate : —

‘ That is better than a dig in the eye with a burnt stick ! ’

The first time Théodore heard this speech, which was new to him, it upset his gravity, and he laughed so heartily that Thuillier, handsome Thuillier, felt his vanity more tickled than it had ever been. After that, Théodore always responded to the pleasantry with a knowing smile.

This little detail will explain how it was that on the very morning of the day when he had his sparring match with Olivier Vinet, he had happened to say to Thuillier, as they walked round the garden to look at the effects of the frost : —

‘ You are far wittier than you fancy.’

And had received this answer : —

‘ In any other career, my dear Théodore, I should have come to the front ; but the Emperor's overthrow broke my neck.’

‘ Time is yet before you,’ said the young lawyer. ‘ Why, what has that mountebank Colleville done to deserve the Cross ? ’

And here Maître de la Peyrade had laid his finger on the sore that Thuillier hid from every eye, so effectually indeed that even his sister knew it not ; but this young fellow, whose interest it was to study all the citizen class, had guessed the secret envy eating into the ex-clerk’s heart.

‘ If you, with all your experience, will do me the honour of being guided by my advice,’ the philanthropist went on, ‘ and above all will never breathe a word of our compact without my consent, not even to your admirable sister, I will undertake to get you the Legion of Honour with the acclamations of all the district.’

'Oh! if only we could do that,' Thuillier had exclaimed, 'you cannot think what I would not do for you!'

And this explains why Thuillier had drawn himself up pompously when Théodore had been so audacious as to lend him an opinion.

In the arts—and Molière, perhaps, ranked hypocrisy with the arts, by placing Tartuffe for ever among the actor-tribe—there is a pitch of perfection, above talent, which only genius can attain to. There is so faint a line between a work of genius and a work of talent that only a man of genius can appreciate the distance that divides Raphael from Correggio, Titian from Rubens. Nay, more: the vulgar are deceived; the stamp of genius is a certain appearance of facility. The work of genius, in fact, must, at first sight, look quite ordinary, so natural is it, above all things, even in the loftiest subjects. A great many peasant-women carry a baby as the famous Madonna of Dresden carries hers.—Well, and the crowning triumph of art, in a man of such ability as Théodore, is to have it said of him later: 'He would have taken any one in!'

Now, in Thuillier's room, he scented the dawn of contradiction; he discerned in Colleville the clear and critical insight of an unsuccessful artist.

The young lawyer knew that Colleville did not like him; Colleville, as a result of various coincidences, useless to relate, had really been led to believe in the augury of anagrams. None of his anagrams had failed. He had been well laughed at in the office when on being asked what the letters of Auguste Jean ~~Minard~~ might spell, he transposed them into *J'a<sup>u</sup>i une si grande fortune* (I amassed such a great fortune). Minard was very poor, but ten years later the anagram was justified.

Now that of Théodore was luckless. His wife's made him quake, and he had never told it to anybody, for Flavie

Minard Colleville made *La vieille C., nom flétrit, vole* (Old Madame C., a blighted name, steals).

On various occasions Théodore had made advances to the genial official of the Mairie, and had felt repelled by a coldness hardly natural in so communicative a man.

When the game of *bouillotte* was ended, Colleville drew Thuillier for a moment into a window-recess and said :—

‘ You are giving that young lawyer his head too much ; he quite took the lead in the conversation this evening.’

‘ Thank you, my friend ; forewarned is forearmed ! ’ replied Thuillier, laughing in his sleeve at Colleville’s caution.

Théodore, who happened to be talking to Madame Colleville, kept an eye on the two friends ; and by the same instinct which women use to know when and to what effect they are being talked about, all across a drawing-room, he guessed that Colleville was trying to injure him in the opinion of that weak and simple Thuillier.

‘ Madame,’ said he in the pious lady’s ear, ‘ believe me, if there is anybody here capable of appreciating you, it is I. Any one on seeing you would say : here is a pearl fallen in the mire ; you are not forty-two, for a woman’s age is only what it seems, and many a woman of thirty, not to compare with you, would be glad indeed to have your figure and the beautiful face on which love has set his stamp without ever having filled your heart. You have dedicated yourself to God, I know, and I am too religious to wish to be anything more than your friend ; but you have given yourself to Him because you have never found a man worthy of you. You have indeed been loved, but I can see that you have never felt yourself worshipped. And here comes your husband, who has never been able to make a position for you suitable to your merits,—he hates me as though he could suspect that I love you, and just prevents my telling you now what I think I have hit upon to place you in the sphere for which nature intended you.—No, Madame,’ he went on in a louder tone, ‘ it is not the Abbé

Gondrin who is the Lent preacher this year in our humble church of Saint-Jacques du Haut-Pas ; it is Monsieur d'Estival, a fellow-countryman of mine, who devotes himself to preaching for the benefit of the poorest class, and you will hear one of the most cogent preachers I know ; a priest of an unattractive appearance, but such a soul ! —'

'Then my desires will be fulfilled,' said poor Madame Thuillier. 'I never could understand our famous preachers.'

A faint smile was seen on Mademoiselle Thuillier's lips and on those of other persons.

'They discourse too much of theological demonstrations ; I have long been of that opinion,' said Théodore. 'But I never discuss religion, and but for Madame Colleville —'

'Are there demonstrations then in theology ?' asked the mathematical professor guilelessly and point blank.

'I cannot suppose, Monsieur,' said Théodore, looking up at Félix Phellion, 'that you ask the question seriously.'

'Félix divides religion into two categories,' said old Phellion, coming ponderously to his son's support, as he saw a pained expression on Madame Thuillier's pale face. 'He regards it from the human and from the divine point of view — tradition and reason.'

'What a heresy, Monsieur !' said Théodore. 'Religion is indivisible ; it insists on faith above all else.'

Old Phellion, pinioned by this speech, looked at his wife.

'It is time, my dear — ' and he glanced at the clock.

'Oh, Monsieur Félix,' said Céleste, in an undertone, to the frank mathematician, 'cannot you, like Pascal and Bossuet, be at once learned and pious ?'

The Phellions departing, the Collevilles followed ; soon no one was left but Dutocq, Théodore, and the Thuilliers.

The flattery lavished on Flavie by Théodore was of the most commonplace type ; but to understand this narrative it must be noted that the advocate kept himself in tune with these ordinary minds ; he sailed their waters and spoke

their language. Pierre Grassou was his painter, not Joseph Bridau; *Paul et Virginie* was his romance. The greatest living poet to him was Casimir Delavigne; in his eyes utility was the aim and end of art. Parmentin, the *inventor* of the potato, was, said he, better than thirty Raphaels; the man in the blue cloak was to him 'A Sister of Charity.' These phrases, which were Thuillier's, he would occasionally echo.

'That young Félix Phellion,' said he now, 'is just the college man of our day, the outcome of science which has pensioned off God. Bless me! What are we coming to? Nothing but religion can save France, for the fear of hell alone will preserve us from the domestic thieving that is perpetually going on in the heart of every household, eating into the soundest fortunes. You all have an internecine struggle in your very midst.'

With this brilliant harangue he went away, after bidding the Thuilliers good-night, leaving Brigitte greatly impressed. Dutocq accompanied him.

'That is a young fellow of great talent!' said Thuillier sententiously.

'Yes, indeed, on my word!' replied Brigitte, as she put the lamps out.

'He is religious,' said Madame Thuillier, leading the way.

'Môsieur,' said Phellion to Colleville, as they reached the School of Mines, looking round to make sure that they were alone in the street, 'I am in the habit of surrendering to the superior knowledge of others, but I cannot help seeing that this young lawyer lords it too grandly over our friends, the Thuilliers.'

'It is my private opinion,' replied Colleville, walking with Phellion behind his wife, Céleste, and Madame Phellion, who hung closely together, 'he is a Jesuit, and I do not like those people — the best of them are good for noth-

ing. To me, Jesuit means trickery, and trickery with intent; they deceive for the pleasure of deceiving, and to keep their hand in, as the saying goes. That is my opinion, and I make no bones over saying so.'

'I understand you, Monsieur,' replied Phellion, who had Colleville's arm.

'No, Monsieur Phellion,' said Flavie, in a high little voice, 'you do not understand Colleville; but I know what he means, and he had better say no more. Such matters are not for discussion in the street at eleven o'clock at night and before a young girl.'

'You are right, my dear,' said Colleville.

At the corner of the Rue des Deux Eglises, which was the Phelliens' road, they said good-night. Félix said to Colleville:—

'Monsieur, your son François, if he were pushed, might get into the École Polytechnique. I undertake to qualify him for passing the examinations this year.'

'That is too good an offer to refuse; thank you, my good friend,' said Colleville. 'It shall be seen to.'

'Well done,' said Phellion to his son.

'A very clever idea,' said his mother.

'Why, what have you discovered in it?' asked Félix.

'Why, it is a very ingenious way of doing the polite to Céleste's parents.'

'May I never solve another problem if I thought of it!' cried the young professor. 'I found out by talking to the boys that François has a turn for mathematics, and I thought it right to inform his father—'

'Quite right, my son!' repeated Phellion. 'I would not have you different. All my wishes are fulfilled, and I find my son honest, honourable, possessed of all the public and private virtues I could wish.'

As soon as Céleste had gone to her room Madame Colleville said to her husband:—

'Colleville, do not pronounce judgment on people so crudely without knowing them thoroughly. When you speak of Jesuits I know you are thinking of priests, and you will oblige me by keeping your opinions on religion to yourself when your daughter is present. We may sacrifice our own souls if we please, but not our children's. Do you want your daughter to be a creature devoid of religion? And besides, dear old boy, we are at the world's mercy; we have four children to provide for, and can you say that sooner or later you may not need the help of this one or that one? So do not make enemies; you have none; you are the best of good souls, and thanks to that, which in you is quite a charm, we have got on pretty well so far!'

'That will do!' said Colleville, who had flung his coat into a chair and was taking off his neck-cloth. 'I was wrong; you are right, my beauty.'

'At the first opportunity, my dear old fellow,' said the cunning little woman, patting her husband's cheeks, 'you try to do the civil to that little lawyer; he is a sharp customer; we must have him on our side. He can play a part? Well, play up to him. Pretend to be his dupe, and if he is clever, if he has a future before him, make him your friend. Do you suppose that I want you to stick as a mayor of a district?'

'Come here, *femme* Colleville,' said the ex-clarinet player, patting his knee to show his wife the place where she was to perch, 'let us toast our tootsems and talk. When I look at you I am each time more certain that the youth of a woman is in her figure—'

'And in her heart!—'

'In both,' replied Colleville, 'a light figure and a heavy heart—'

'No, silly — a deep heart.'

'What is so nice in you is that you have kept your complexion without having to grow fat; but then you have

small bones. I tell you, Flavie, if I had to begin life again I would not choose another wife.'

'And you know I always liked you better than *the others*. What a pity it is that monseigneur is dead! Do you know what I should like?'

'No.'

'A post in the municipality at about twelve thousand francs, as a cashier, say either in Paris, or at Poissy — or as an agent.'

'Either would meet my views.'

'Well, then, supposing that monster of a lawyer could do anything; he can intrigue, you may depend on it. We will be civil to him; I will feel my way — just leave it to me; and above all do not spoil his game at the Thuilliers.'

Théodore had touched the aching spot in Flavie Collerville's heart, and this needs an explanation which may perhaps afford a synthetical survey of women's lives.

At the age of forty a woman, especially if she has tasted the poisoned apple of passion, is aware of a solemn dread; she perceives that two deaths await her — that of the body and that of the heart. If we divide women into the two great classes which answer to the commonest view of them: the virtuous and the guilty, it is safe to say that all alike, after that terrible date in life, are aware of an acute pain.

If virtuous and cheated of the craving of their nature, whether they have been brave enough for resignation, or have buried their rebelliousness in their souls or at the foot of the altar, they feel some horror as they say to themselves, 'All is over!' The thought has such strange and infernal ths that we find in it the cause of some of the apostasies that now and then startle and appal the world.

If guilty, they find themselves at a dizzy height in one of those positions which sometimes, alas, find expression in

madness or end in death or in some passion as tremendous as the situation.

This is the fallacy that lies at the bottom of the crisis : Either a woman has been happy, has made a virtue of happiness and can breathe no other than this atmosphere of incense, can move only in the blossom-laden air where flattery is a perpetual caress — and so how can she give it up ? Or else — which is even more strange than rare — in her pursuit of the happiness that eluded her she has found none but fatiguing pleasures, while sustained in the ardour of her pursuit by the incitements of satiated vanity, spurred to the chase like a gambler doubling his stakes, for, to her, the last days of her beauty are the last thing she risks on the cards of despair.

‘ You have been loved but never worshipped.’ This speech of la Peyrade’s, emphasised by a look which read, not her heart, but her life, was the solution of an enigma, and Flavie felt herself explained.

The lawyer had repeated certain sentiments which books have made commonplace ; but it matters not of what make or material the whip is that stings the sore of a thoroughbred horse. The poetry was in Flavie, not in the verse, just as the noise is not in the avalanche though it brings it down.

A young officer, two coxcombs, a banker, a clumsy lad, and poor Colleville were a melancholy set of experiences. Once in her life, indeed, Madame Colleville had dreamed of happiness, but she had not felt it, and death had hastily cut short the only passion in which Flavie had found any real charm. For two years now she had been obedient to the voice of religion, which had taught her that neither the Church nor the world speaks of happiness and love, but only of duty and submission ; that in the eyes of those two great powers happiness dwells in the satisfaction obtained from painful or costly sacrifice, for which there is no reward in this life. But she

still heard a shriller voice; and as her religion was but a necessary mask she wore and not a conversion, as she could not take it off because she regarded it as a resource in the future, since devotion, true or feigned, was a way of living not unfitted to her future years, she clung to the Church, seated as it were on a bench in a forest-glade, reading the guide-posts to the ways; and awaiting what might happen as she felt night closing in.

Then her curiosity was greatly excited when she heard Théodore plainly state her secret position, without any assumption of taking advantage of it, but attacking the inner side only of her nature by holding out a hope of the realisation of an airy vision already seven or eight times destroyed.

Ever since the beginning of the winter she had understood that Théodore was surreptitiously watching her and studying her through and through. More than once she had put on her grey watered-silk gown, her black lace, and her little head-dress of flowers twisted in with Mechlin, to make the best of herself; and a man always knows when a woman has dressed for him. The dreadful dandy of the Empire smothered her with vulgar flattery; she was the queen of the evening — but the Provençal said much more by a subtle glance.

Sunday after Sunday Flavie had expected him to make love to her; she said to herself: ‘He knows I am a pauper and he has not a penny! Or perhaps he is really pious?’

Théodore was determined to hurry nothing; like a skillful musician, he had marked the place in the symphony where he meant to hit the drum. As soon as he saw that Belleville was trying to raise suspicions in Thuillier, he had used the broadside he had so carefully prepared during the months he had spent in studying Flavie, and with success, in the morning he had succeeded with Thuillier.

As he went to bed he reflected: —

“The wife is on my side; the husband cannot endure

me. At this moment they are squabbling and I shall win the day, for she does what she likes with her husband.'

But the Provençal was mistaken, so far as that there had not been the smallest disagreement, and that Colleville was sleeping by his dear little Flavie's side, while she was saying to herself :—

'Théodore is a very superior man.'

A great many men like la Peyrade derive superiority from the boldness or difficulty of an undertaking ; the energy they must display gives solidity to their muscles ; they throw all their strength into it, and then, whether they achieve success or meet with an overthrow, the world is surprised to see that they are small or mean, or worn out.

After having aroused a curiosity that was sure to become feverish, in the minds of the persons on whom Céleste's fate depended, Théodore affected to be extremely busy ; for five or six days he was out from morning till night, so as not to see Flavie again till her desire had reached the point where she would overstep any limits of propriety, and so as to compel Thuillier to call on him.

He was almost certain to meet Madame Colleville at church on the following Sunday ; in fact, they came out at the same moment, and met in the Rue des Deux Eglises. Théodore offered his arm to Flavie, who accepted it, sending her daughter on in front with Anatole. This youngest of her children, now twelve years old, was a day-boarder at Barniol's school, where he was being prepared in the elements ; Phellion's son-in-law had naturally reduced the price for his day-board in anticipation of the hoped-for alliance between the Phelliens and Céleste.

'Have you done me the honour and favour of thinking over what I said to you so blunderingly the other day ?' asked the lawyer in an insinuating tone, as he pressed the fair one's arm to his heart with a gesture at once gentle and firm, for he affected to suppress his feelings and seem respectful against his impulse. 'Do not misunderstand

me,' he went on, as he met such a glance from Madame Colleville's eyes as women, practised in the arts of passion, can find to express either severe reproof or a secret community of feelings. 'I love you as a man loves a noble nature struggling against misfortune. Christian charity embraces the strong as well as the weak, and its treasures are for all. Refined, graceful, and elegant as you are, made to be the ornament of the highest sphere, what man can see you, without the deepest compassion, dragging out your life among these odious middle-class people who do not understand you — not even the aristocratic perfection of one of your attitudes, of one of your looks, or of one of your bewitching tones of voice. — Oh ! if I were but rich, if it were only in my power, your husband, who is really a good soul, should be made a collector general, and you could get him elected deputy. — But I, poor and ambitious, whose first duty is to crush my ambition since I am left at the bottom of the bag like the last number of a lottery, I can only offer you my arm instead of my heart. All my hopes are centred in a good marriage, and believe me, not only will I make my wife happy, but I will raise her to a high position in the State if she brings me the means of advancement. — It is a very fine day ; come for a little walk in the Luxembourg,' he added, as they reached the Rue d'Enfer and the corner of Madame Colleville's house, opposite to which was a passage into the gardens down the steps of a little structure, the last remnant of the famous Carthusian Convent.

The unresisting arm linked into his own gave Flavie's tacit consent, and as she deserved the honour of some show of violence, he dragged her away quickly, adding : —

'Come along ; we shall not always have such a good opportunity. — Oh ! ' he exclaimed, ' your husband sees us ; he is at the window ; walk slowly — '

'You need have no fear of Monsieur Colleville,' said Flavie, smiling. 'He leaves me absolutely my own mistress.'

‘Oh! such, indeed, is the woman of my dreams!’ exclaimed the Provençal with the ecstatic accent that only fires a southern soul and comes from southern lips.

‘Forgive me, Madame,’ he said, checking himself, and coming down from the upper regions to the exiled angel at whom he piously gazed. ‘Forgive me! To return to what I was saying — oh! how can I be insensible to the sufferings I myself experience when I see them no less the lot of a being to whom life ought to bring nothing but joy and happiness! — Your sorrows are mine; I am no more in my right place than you are in yours; the same ill fortune has made us brother and sister.

‘Ah! dear Flavie! — The first time I was so happy as to see you was on the last Sunday in September, 1838. You were lovely! I shall often recall you in that little *mousseline de laine* frock, a tartan of some Scottish clan. — I said to myself that evening: “Why is that woman at the Thuilliers?” above all, why had she ever any connection with this Thuillier?’

‘Monsieur!’ cried Flavie, terrified at the ominously swift flow that the Provençal had given to the conversation.

‘Oh! I know all,’ he exclaimed, with a twitch of his shoulder, ‘and I understand everything — and I do not esteem you the less. There, there! These are not the sins of an ugly woman or a hunchback. You have to gather the fruit of your error, and I will help you: Céleste will be very rich, and that is where all your future prospects lie; you can have but one son-in-law; be clever enough to choose him well. An ambitious man may rise to office, but he will humiliate you, annoy you, and make your daughter miserable; if he loses her fortune he will certainly never remake it. — Yes, indeed, I love you,’ he added, ‘with unbounded devotion; you are superior to a thousand petty considerations that enmesh fools. Let us understand each other — ’

Flavie was astounded; at the same time this excessive

frankness appealed to her. ‘This man is plain-spoken enough!’ said she to herself. Still, she acknowledged that she had never been so deeply moved and agitated as by this young man.

‘Monsieur,’ said she, ‘I do not know who can have misled you so completely as to my past life or by what right—’

‘Pray forgive me, Madame,’ the Provençal put in with a coldness bordering on scorn. ‘I dreamt it all! I said to myself: “She is all that!” but I was deceived by appearances. I know now why you will live on for ever in fourth-floor rooms in the Rue d’Enfer.’

And he emphasised the retort with a vehement wave of his arm in the direction of the window where Colleville could be seen from the avenue in the gardens where they were walking alone, a vast field tilled and turned by so many young ambitions.

‘I have been perfectly frank; I expected reciprocity. I have gone many a day without bread, Madame; I managed to live, to study law, to qualify as a licentiate of law in Paris, on a capital of two thousand francs. I came in by the barrière d’Italie with five hundred francs in my pocket, vowing, like a countryman of mine, that I would some day be one of the leading men of my country. And a man who has often picked his breakfast out of the baskets into which cook-shops throw their leavings, and which they empty in the street at six in the morning when the second-hand eating-houses can find nothing worth taking — such a man will shrink from no means that he may own to. Do you believe that I am the People’s Friend?’ said he, smiling. ‘Fame must have her trumpet; she cannot be heard if she speaks in a whisper; and without fame of what use is talent? The Advocate of the Poor will become the advocate of the rich. Now, have I not opened my inmost soul? Open your heart to me. Say, “we will be friends,” and some day we will all be happy.’

'Oh, dear! why did I come with you? Why did I take your arm?' exclaimed Flavie.

'Because it was your destiny!' replied he. 'My dear and beloved Flavie,' he went on, pressing her arm to his heart, 'did you expect to hear me make commonplace speeches? We are sister and brother — that is the whole story.'

And he turned back toward the steps to return to the Rue d'Enfer.

At the back of the satisfaction which a woman finds in violent excitement, Flavie was conscious of a great dread, and she mistook this terror for the sort of alarm that comes of a new passion; but she was spellbound, and walked on in utter silence.

'What are you thinking about?' asked Théodore, half-way along the passage.

'Of all you have been saying,' she replied.

'But at our age,' said he, 'we skip the preliminaries; we are not children, and we both live in a sphere in which we ought to understand each other. In short,' he added, as they turned into the Rue d'Enfer, 'believe me, I am wholly yours.' And he bowed solemnly.

'The irons are in the fire,' said he to himself as he watched the retreat of his dazzled prey.

On going home Théodore found on his landing a man who figures in this tale as a submarine agent, or like a buried church on which the front of a palace is built up. The sight of this man, who, having rung in vain at la Peyrade's door, was now pulling Dutocq's bell, startled the Provençal; but the shock was internal; nothing on the surface betrayed this hidden agitation.

This was Céritet, the man of whom Dutocq had spoken to Thuillier as his copying-clerk.

Céritet, who was but eight and thirty, looked fifty, so wrecked was he by all that ages a man. His bald head

showed a yellow skull, meagrely covered by a wig rusty with wear ; his pale, flaccid features, curiously rough-hewn, were all the more unpleasant by reason of his nose being much disfigured ; not indeed so badly as to make it necessary that he should wear a false nose ; from the bridge at the forehead to the nostrils it was as nature made it, but disease had destroyed the nostrils towards the lip, leaving two holes of uncertain outline, thickening his pronunciation and hindering his speech. His eyes had been fine, but were weakened by every form of work and wear and sitting late at night ; they were rimmed with red, and evidently damaged ; his look when animated by an expression of mischief might have frightened judges and criminals — even those who are frightened at nothing. His mouth, bereft of teeth, or retaining only a few blackened wrecks, was sinister, and moistened with a foam of white saliva which did not, however, wet his thin, colourless lips.

Céribet, a small man, not so much lean as shrunken, tried to correct the disasters to his person by dress, and though the costume was not magnificent, he kept it in a state of scrupulous cleanliness that perhaps enhanced its wretchedness. Everything about him was doubtful, like his age, his nose, and his expression. It was impossible to guess whether he were eight and thirty or sixty, whether his blue trousers, faded but neatly strapped, would be in the fashion ere long, or dated from the year 1835. A pair of boots, gone limp, but carefully blacked, and resoled for the third time, had once been good, and had perhaps trodden the carpets of official residences. His overcoat with braided frogs, drenched in many a shower, and oval buttons that indiscreetly betrayed the moulds, showed by its cut that it had once been elegant. His satin stock and tie hid the lack of linen with some success, but at the back the teeth of the buckle had frayed the stuff, which was shining with the oleaginous friction of his wig. In the days of its youth his waistcoat had been smart, but it was one of

those waistcoats which are sold for four francs out of the depths of a ready-made-clothes shop. Every article was carefully brushed, including the bruised and shining silk hat. Everything was in harmony and matched the black gloves of this subaltern Mephistopheles, of whom the history may be told in a few words.

He was an artist in wickedness, with whom at first wickedness had succeeded, and who, deluded by his early triumphs, persisted in plotting infamy always well within the letter of the law. By treachery to his master he had become owner of a printing business; then he had been fined as the publisher of a liberal newspaper, and in the country, after the Restoration, he became one of the pet victims of the royalist Ministry, and was called the ‘unfortunate’ Cérezet, like the unfortunate Chauvet, or the heroic Mercier. In 1830 this reputation for patriotism earned him a place as *sous-préfet*, which he lost six months later; but he declared that he had been condemned unheard, and made so much noise about it, that during Casimir Perier’s administration he was made the editor of an anti-republican paper in the pay of the Government. After that he went into business, and among the concerns he was mixed up with was one of the most disastrous joint-stock companies that ever gave rise to criminal proceedings; he took the severe sentence he incurred quite unabashed, asserting that it was a piece of revenge got up by the republican party, who could not forgive him for the severe handling it had met with from his newspaper, and was paying him back tenfold. He spent his term of imprisonment in a lunatic asylum.

The authorities were at last ashamed of a man who had risen from the foundling hospital, and whose almost crapulous habits and disgraceful swindling, in combination with a retired banker named Claparon, had brought him down to well-deserved reprobation. Thus Cérezet, fallen inch by inch to the lowest step of the social ladder, only obtained

the place of copying clerk in Dutocq's office by appealing to a remnant of pity.

In the lowest pit of misery this man dreamed of retaliation ; and as he had nothing left to lose, he was ready for any means of achieving it. Dutocq and he were bound together by their equal depravity. Cérezet was to Dutocq, in that neighbourhood, what a dog is to the sportsman. Cérezet, experienced in all the needs of poverty, lent small sums on short loans at enormous interest ; he began as Dutocq's partner, and this ancient gutter-boy, now became the costermongers' banker, the truck merchants' bill-discounter, was the gnawing worm of the district.

'I say,' said Cérezet, when Dutocq opened his door, 'Théodore is come in ; let us go to his rooms.'

The advocate of the poor let the two men in before him. They all three crossed a small room, with a tiled end waxed floor, the red, encaustic tiles reflecting the daylight that came in between cotton curtains, showing a plain, round, walnut-wood table, and a walnut-wood sideboard on which a lamp stood. Through it they went into a small sitting-room with red curtains and mahogany furniture, covered with red Utrecht velvet ; the wall opposite the windows was furnished with a bookcase filled with law books. Vulgar ornaments graced the chimney-shelf,—a clock with four mahogany columns, and candlesticks under shades. The study where the three friends seated themselves in front of a coal fire was the study of a budding pleader, the furniture consisting of a writing-table, an arm-chair, short, green silk blinds to the windows, a green carpet, a set of pigeon holes for boxes, and a sofa, over which hung an ivory crucifix, mounted on velvet. The bedroom, kitchen, and other rooms looked out on the court-yard.

'Well,' said Cérezet, 'is it all right ? Are things moving ?'

'Yes,' replied Théodore.

'Confess, now, that I had a bright idea,' cried Dutocq,

‘when I thought of a way of getting round that gaby Thuillier.’

‘Yes, but I am not behindhand,’ exclaimed Céribet. ‘I have come this morning to show you the way to fit the thumb-screws on to the old maid and make her spin like a teetotum. Make no mistake; Mademoiselle Thuillier is everything in this affair; if you win her over, you take the citadel. Say little, but to the purpose, as befits those who know what they are about. My old partner, Claparon, is, as you know, an idiot, and he will be all his life what he has been, a stalking horse. At this moment his name is put forward by a Paris notary, mixed up with some builders, who are all going to the dogs together,—notary, masons, and all! Claparon is the scapegoat; he has never been bankrupt, and everything must have a beginning; at this moment he is stowed away in my den in the Rue des Poules, where no one will ever find him. Now Claparon is furious; he has not a sou; and among the five or six houses which have to be sold, there is one, a perfect gem, all of squared stone, close to the Madeleine,—a frontage all patterned over like a melon, and with lovely sculpture,—and not being finished, it will be sold for a hundred thousand francs at most; by spending twenty-five thousand francs on it, it will be worth ten thousand francs a year in a couple of years’ time. Now, by helping Mademoiselle Thuillier to secure this property, you can win her heart, for you can give her to understand that such bargains may be met with every year. Vain people can be managed either by working on their conceit or by threats; money-grabbers by attacking or by filling their purse. And as, after all, working for the Thuilliers is working for ourselves, we must enable her to benefit by this stroke of business.’

‘But the notary?’ said Dutocq, ‘why does he let it slip through his fingers?’

‘The notary, my dear boy! It is he who is the making

of us. Being obliged to sell his business, and ruined, in fact, he has kept this portion of the crumbs of the cake. Believing in that idiot Claparon's honesty, he has instructed him to find a nominal purchaser, for he looks for equal confidence and prudence. We will leave him to suppose that Mademoiselle Thuillier is an honest woman, allowing poor Claparon to make use of her name; and the notary and Claparon will both be caught. I owe my friend Claparon this little turn, for he let me in for the brunt of the battle in his joint-stock concern, which was bowled over by Couture—in whose skin you would be sorry to find yourselves!' he added, with a flash of devilish hatred in his dulled eyes. 'Gentlemen, I have spoken!' he said, in a big voice which trumpeted through his nose, as he assumed a theatrical attitude, for once, in an hour of abject poverty, he had tried the stage.

As he ended his harangue there was a ring at the bell, and la Peyrade went to open the door.

'Do you still feel sure of him?' said Céritet to Dutocq. 'I fancy there is something about him—in short, I have had experience of betrayals.'

'He is so completely in our power,' said Dutocq, 'that I did not take the trouble to watch him. Still, between ourselves, I had not thought him so spry all round as he certainly is. We thought we were mounting a man who could not ride a thoroughbred, and the rascal is a jockey!'

'He had better mind what he is about,' said Céritet mysteriously. 'I can blow him over like a house of cards. As to you, Daddy Dutocq, you can see him at work and keep an eye on him; watch him closely. And I can feel his pulse, too, by getting Claparon to propose to him to get rid of us; then we shall know where we are.'

'That is not a bad idea,' said Dutocq. 'You can see as far as most people.'

'We are tarred with the same brush, that's all,' replied Céritet.

These remarks were spoken in an undertone while Théodore went to the door and returned. When the lawyer came back, Cérizet was examining everything in the study.

'It is Thuillier,' said Théodore, 'I expected him to call. He is in the drawing-room. He must not see Cérizet's great-coat.' he added smiling; 'those trimmings would alarm him.'

'Pooh! you are the friend of the poor; it is all part of the performance. Do you want some money?' asked Cérizet, taking a hundred francs out of his trousers' pocket. 'There, that looks well,' and he placed the pile of silver on the chimney-shelf.

'And we can get away through the bedroom,' said Dutocq.

'Very well, good-bye then,' said the Provençal, opening a papered door leading from the study to the bedroom. 'Come in here, my dear Monsieur Thuillier,' he called out to the erstwhile 'buck.'

Then as soon as he saw him come to the study door, he went to let out his two confederates through the bedroom, dressing-room, and kitchen, which opened on to the landing.

'In six months you must be Céleste's husband and looking up in the world. You are a lucky dog; you have not found yourself in the dock of a police court twice, as I have: the first time in 1825, for constructive treason, as they called it — a series of newspaper articles that I never wrote; and the second time for appropriating the profits of a joint-stock company that never came to anything. Come, get the pot boiling, by the piper! for Dutocq and I want our twenty-five thousand francs apiece deuced badly; and be brave, my good fellow!' he added, holding out his hand to Théodore to test him by his grip of it.

The Provençal gave Cérizet his right hand and wrung his with much warmth.

'My dear boy, you may be very sure that whatever position I may attain I shall not forget the plight from which

you rescued me to set me on horseback here. I am your bait; but you are giving me the lion's share, and I should be worse than a convict turned spy if I did not play a square game.'

As soon as the door was shut Cérizet peeped through the keyhole to see la Peyrade's face; but the lawyer had turned his back, going to join Thuillier, and his suspicious ally could not see what expression his features assumed.

It was neither disgust or dismay, but joy, which the released features expressed. Théodore saw his means of succeeding multiplying, and he flattered himself he could get rid of his sordid comrades, though indeed he owed everything to them. Poverty has unfathomable depths, especially in Paris, miry bogs, from which, when a drowned man comes to the surface again, he brings foul matter clinging to his body or his clothes. Cérizet, once the wealthy friend and patron of Théodore, was now the filthy stain that still stuck to the Provençal, and the promoter of the joint-stock company could guess that he was only too anxious to brush him off, now that he moved in a sphere where decent attire was indispensable.

'My dear Théodore,' said Thuillier, 'we have been hoping to see you every day of the week, and each evening has brought us disappointment. As next Sunday is our dinner-party day, my sister and my wife desired me to beg you to come—'

'I have been so very busy,' said Théodore, 'that I have not had two minutes to give to anybody, not even to you, whom I count as one of my friends, and to whom I particularly wanted to speak—'

'Then you have really thought seriously of what you told me?' cried Thuillier, interrupting Théodore.

'If you had not come to clinch the matter, I should esteem you less than I do,' replied la Peyrade, smiling. 'You have been a second-class clerk; you must therefore have some remnants of ambition, and in you it is legitimate, or the

deuce is in it ! Why, really, between you and me, when we see a man like Minard, — a gilded crock, going to make his bow to the King and swagger about the Tuileries ; or Popinot, again, on the high way to office, — and you, a man inured to the routine of administration, a man with thirty years' experience, left to prick out seedlings ! What can I say ? I will be frank with you, my dear Thuillier. I want to get you on because you will pull me after you.

‘ Well, and this is my plan. We shall have to elect a member of the Municipal Council for this district, and you must be the man . . . and you *shall* be the man,’ he added, emphasising the word. ‘ Some day, at the next general election, you will be representative of the district in the lower Chamber — and the time is not far off. The votes which will elect you to the Municipal Council will not fail you when it is a question of getting into Parliament ; you may depend upon me for that.’

‘ But what means have you ? ’ asked Thuillier, dazzled.

‘ You shall know. But leave this long and delicate business to me to manage ; if you make any foolish talk as to what is said or planned or agreed upon between us, I leave you to yourself and wish you a very good morning.’

‘ Oh, you may trust an old second clerk to hold his tongue ; I have known secrets — ’

‘ Very well ! But you must keep these secrets from your wife, your sister, Monsieur and Madame Colleville.’

‘ Not a muscle of my face shall move,’ said Thuillier, setting his features.

‘ Very good,’ said la Peyrade. ‘ I will test you. To be eligible you must pay the full amount of taxes, and that you do not do.’

‘ I beg your pardon, I pay enough to sit on the Municipal Council : two francs and eighty-six centimes.’

‘ Yes, but to sit in the Chamber five hundred francs is the qualification, and you have no time to lose, for you must prove possession for a year.’

‘The Devil !’ said Thuillier, ‘how am I to rise to a rating of five hundred francs within the next twelvemonth ?’

‘You may be paying it by the end of July. My devotion to you leads me to confide to you the secret of a stroke of business which will enable you to make thirty or forty thousand francs a year on a capital of a hundred and fifty thousand at most. But in your household, you see, your sister has long been at the head of all business arrangements, and I have no fault to find with that. She has the soundest judgment possible ; it will be necessary, therefore, to begin with, that I should have the opportunity of winning Mademoiselle Brigitte’s regard and friendship by proposing this investment to her—and for this reason : If Mademoiselle Thuillier did not believe in me, we should get into trouble ; but how can you suggest to your sister that she should buy the property in your name ? It would be far better that the idea should come from me. However, you shall both be enabled to judge of the opportunity.

‘As to the means at my command for promoting your election to the Municipal Council of the Seine, they are these : Phellion can command one-fourth of the votes in the district he and Laudigeois have lived in for thirty years ; they are regarded as oracles. I have a friend who can dispose of another fourth, and the Curé of Saint-Jacques, who is not without influence, may secure a few votes. Dutocq, who is as well known to the residents as the justice of the peace, will do his best for me, especially if I am not working for myself ; and then Colleville, as secretary to the Mayor, represents one-fourth of the votes.’

‘To be sure !’ cried Thuillier. ‘I am as good as elected.’

‘Do you think so ?’ said la Peyrade, in a tone of alarming irony. ‘Well then, only go to your friend Colleville, and ask him to help you ; you will see what he says. Success in an election is never secured by the candidate but by his friends. You must never ask for anything for

yourself ; you must wait to be urged to accept it, and seem to have no ambition.'

'La Peyrade !' cried Thuillier, rising and taking the young lawyer's hand, 'you are a monstrous clever fellow.'

'No match for you, but fairly wide-awake,' replied the Provençal, smiling.

'And if we succeed, how am I to repay you ?' asked Thuillier guilelessly.

'Ah, that is the point ! You will think me audacious ; but you must remember that there is in me a feeling which must plead my excuses, for it has given me courage to try every resource. I am in love, and to you I confide my secret.'

'But with whom ?' said Thuillier.

'With your sweet little Céleste,' replied la Peyrade, 'and my love is surety for my devotion to you ; what would I not do for a father-in-law ? It is but selfishness ; it is working for my own ends.'

'Hush !' cried Thuillier.

'Why, my friend, if Flavie were not on my side,' said la Peyrade, putting his hands on Thuillier's hips, 'and if I did not know all, should I speak of it to you ? Only on this point say nothing to her ; wait till she speaks.'

'Listen to me ; I am of the stuff that ministers are made of, and I do not want to wear Céleste without having won her ; you shall not plight her to me till the day when your name is drawn out of the ballot-box often enough to make you a deputy of Paris. To be a member for Paris you must get the whip-hand of Minard. Minard must be wiped out, and you must keep your influence in hand ; so, to achieve this result, let them still hope to win Céleste — we will trick them all.'

'Madame Colleville, you, and I will cut a figure some day. Do not, however, think me grasping ; I want Céleste without any fortune, with nothing but her prospects. To live as a member of your family and leave my wife among

you all is what I dream of. You see, I have no underhand schemes. You, within six months of taking your seat on the Town Council, will have the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and will be made Officer of the Order as soon as you are elected. As to your speeches in the Chamber — why, we will write them between us. Perhaps you would do well to write some solid book on half-moral, half-political questions ; for instance, on Charitable Institutions, considered from a lofty standpoint, such as the reform of the Monts-de-Piété, where the abuses are a scandal. Let us do something to make your name known ; it would work well, especially in the immediate district. I tell you, you may get the Cross and become member of the Municipal Council for the Department of the Seine. Well, put your trust in me ; do not think of making me one of your family till you have the ribbon in your button-hole and take your seat in the Chamber of Deputies.

‘ Still, I will do better than that. I will get you forty thousand francs a year.’

‘ For only one of these things you should have our Céleste ! ’

‘ What a jewel ! ’ said la Peyrade, raising his eyes to heaven. ‘ I am foolish enough to pray for her every day. She is enchanting — and very like you. Well, well ! you need not impress secrecy on me ; and it was from Dutocq that I heard it all. Till this evening ! I am off to Phellion’s to see what I can do for you. By the way, you understand that you never for a moment thought of me as a husband for Céleste — you would cut me in pieces sooner. On that matter not a word, not even to Flavie. Wait till she mentions it to you. Phellion will rush at you this evening to secure your adherence to his plans and nominate you as candidate.’

‘ This evening ? ’ said Thuillier.

‘ This evening,’ replied Théodore, ‘ unless I should not find him at home.’

Thuillier went away, saying to himself:—

‘That is a remarkably clever fellow ! We shall get on together. And on my word, it would be hard to do better for Céleste. They would live with us, a family party, and that is a great thing ; he is a good fellow, a genial soul.’

To men of Thuillier’s character, this, a secondary matter really, carries all the weight of a sound reason. Théodore had been delightfully genial.

The house to which la Peyrade presently directed his steps had, for twenty years, been to Phellion his *hoc erat in votis*; but it was as essentially the house of Phellion as the braiding of Céritet’s great-coat was the indispensable ornament of that garment.

This dwelling, only one room deep,—some twenty feet or so,—was built up against a much larger house, and had a sort of little wing with one window, projecting at each end. Its principal merit lay in a garden about thirty fathoms wide, and longer than the frontage by the width of a fore-court towards the street and an arbour of lime trees. Beyond the further wing, the court-yard was shut off from the street by iron railings with a double gate in the middle.

This edifice, built of rough stone stuccoed over, was two storeys high, lime-washed yellow, with Venetian shutters above and boarded shutters below, all painted green. The kitchen was on the ground floor at the end by the court-yard, and the cook, a stout, strong wench, also did duty as gate-keeper, under the guardianship of two enormous dogs.

The façade, consisting of five windows, besides the two wings which projected about six feet, was in the *Style Phellion*. Above the door the owner had inserted a marble panel, on which was inscribed in gilt letters : *Aurea Mediocritas*. Above a sun-dial in another panel he had placed this wise maxim : *Umbra mea vita, sic !*

‘The window-sills had been lately restored with blocks of

red Languedoc marble that he had found in a stone-mason's yard. At the further end of the garden was a painted stone figure looking to the passers-by like a nurse suckling a baby. Phellion was his own gardener.

The ground floor consisted of the dining-room and drawing-room, divided by the staircase and a little hall or ante-room. Beyond the drawing-room was a small room for Phellion's little study.

On the first floor were the bedrooms for the master and mistress and for the young professor; above these, the children's and servants' rooms; for Phellion, out of respect for his own age and his wife's, had allowed himself to set up a man-servant of about fifteen — especially now that his son was a qualified instructor. To the left on entering the fore-court was a small out-building where the firewood was stored, and where in the last owner's time a porter had lodged. The Phelliōns were no doubt waiting till the professor should be married to allow themselves this crowning luxury.

This little freehold, long coveted by the Phelliōns, had cost eighteen thousand francs in 1831. The house was separated from the fore-court by a balustrade on a low wall of hewn stone, formed of hollow tiles laid above each other alternately, and finished at the top with flat stones. This parapet, breast-high, had within it a hedge of China roses, and in the middle was a gate of wooden palings opposite the gates to the street.

Any one who knows the Impasse des Feuillantines will understand that Phellion's house, standing at a right angle to the street, faced south, being sheltered on the north by the high party-wall against which it was built.

The domes of the Pantheon and of the Val-de-Grace stand close by, like two giants, and so effectually block the sky that as you walk in the garden you feel quite shut in. Nor can any spot be more silent than the Impasse des Feuillantines. Such was the retreat chosen by this great

but unrecognized citizen, who was now tasting the pleasures of repose, after paying his debt to his country by working in the office of the Exchequer, from which he had retired as first-class clerk after thirty-six years of service.

In 1832 he had led his battalion of the National Guard to the front at Saint-Merri, but those who were near him saw his eyes were full of tears at the thought of being obliged to fire on his misguided fellow-countrymen. The fight was over by the time the legion had marched at the double across the bridge of Notre-Dame, coming out at the Quai aux Fleurs. His virtuous hesitancy won him the affection of all the neighbourhood, but it lost him the decoration of the Legion of Honour. The Colonel expressed his opinion loudly that a man under arms must never deliberate : the speech made by Louis-Philippe to the National Guard at Metz. But in spite of this, Phellion's civic virtues and the immense respect he enjoyed in the whole neighbourhood had kept him in his rank as Major of the National Guard for eight years. He was now nearly sixty, and as he saw the hour approaching when he would be compelled to lay down the sword and unbuckle the military stock he could only hope that the King would vouchsafe to reward his services by granting him the Legion of Honour.

Truth compels me to say — though such paltriness casts a slur on so noble a character — that Major Phellion stood on tiptoe at the levées at the Tuilleries ; that he put himself in the foreground and made sheep's eyes at the Citizen-King when he dined at his table ; in short, intrigued as best he might, but had never yet met the eye of the king of his choice. The worthy man had already thought of asking Minard to support his secret ambition, but had not yet brought himself to the point.

Phellion, the advocate of passive obedience, was a stoic in all that concerned his duties, iron as to every matter of conscience. To complete the portrait by a sketch of his appearance : at fifty, Phellion was stout, to use the accepted

word ; his face, uniform in colour and marked with the small-pox, was a perfect full moon, so that his lips, which had once been thick, were now nothing remarkable. His eyes were weak and protected by blue spectacles ; the innocence of their light blue was no longer visible to invite a smile ; but his white hair had at last given gravity to a face which, twelve years since, had verged on idiocy and given cause for ridicule. Time, which so cruelly disfigures faces with fine and delicate features, improves those which in youth have been thick and clumsy, and this was the case with Phellion. He occupied the leisure of old age in compiling an abridged history of France ; for Phellion was the author of several books sanctioned by the University.

When la Peyrade came in, the whole of the family was assembled ; Madame Barniol had called to report to her parents on the health of one of her children who was ailing ; the student from the School of Mines was spending the day at home. All in their Sunday best, and seated in front of the fire in the drawing-room, — a panelled room painted in two shades of grey, — on second-hand easy-chairs, they all started on hearing Geneviève, the cook, announce the very man whom they were discussing apropos to Céleste, Félix Phellion's adoration carrying him so far as to make him go to Mass in order to see her. The mathematician had made this effort that very morning, and was being good-naturedly bantered by the family, who at the same time only hoped that Céleste and her parents might appreciate the treasure at their feet.

‘Alas ! The Thuilliers seem to me very much set on an exceedingly dangerous man,’ said Madame Phellion. ‘He made Madame Colleville take his arm this morning, and they went off together to the Luxembourg.’

‘There is something peculiarly sinister in that lawyer,’ exclaimed Félix. ‘If I were told he had committed some crime, I should not be surprised.’

‘That is going too far,’ said his father. ‘He is first

cousin to Tartuffe, the immortal figure cast in bronze by our honest poet, Molière, for Molière's genius, my children, was founded on honesty and patriotism.'

As he pronounced this verdict, Geneviève came in, saying:—

'Monsieur de la Peyrade is here, waiting to speak to master.'

'To me?' cried Monsieur Phellion. 'Show him in,' said he, with the solemnity in small things that made him rather ridiculous, though it always impressed his family, who regarded him as their king.

Phellion, his two sons, his wife, and his daughter, all rose to return the lawyer's inclusive bow.

'To what do we owe the honour of this visit, Monsieur?' said Phellion, with severity.

'To your importance in this part of the town, my dear Monsieur Phellion, and to public business,' replied Théodore.

'Then we will go into my study,' said Phellion.

'No, no, my dear,' said Madame Phellion, a lean little person, as flat as a flounder, and whose face still wore the set severity of a teacher of music in schools for young ladies; 'we will leave you here.'

An upright Erard piano between the windows and opposite the fireplace proclaimed her pretensions still to be considered a virtuoso.

'Oh, am I so unlucky as to put you to flight?' said Théodore, with a genial smile at the mother and daughter. 'You have here a delightful retreat,' he went on, 'and you need only a pretty daughter-in-law to enable you to spend your days in the *Aurea Mediocritas* that was the Latin poet's dream, and in the midst of family joys. Your past labours well deserve such a recompense, for, from what I have heard of you, my dear Monsieur Phellion, you are a good citizen and a patriarch.'

'Môsieur,' said Phellion bashfully. 'I have done my duty, and that is all!'

On hearing the word ‘daughter-in-law’ spoken by Théodore, Madame Barniol, who was as like her mother as two drops of water are alike, looked at Madame Phellion and Félix as much as to say: ‘Can we be mistaken?’

A need for talking this matter over led these four to go out into the garden, for in March, 1840, the weather was almost fine, at any rate in Paris.

‘Major,’ said Théodore, when he was alone with the worthy citizen, who was always flattered by being thus addressed, ‘I have come to speak to you of election matters.’

‘To be sure, we have to appoint a member of the Municipal Council,’ said Phellion, interrupting him.

‘And it is to discuss a candidate that I have ventured to intrude on your Sunday enjoyments, though even so we may not go beyond family interests.’

Phellion himself could not be more completely Phellion than Théodore was at this moment.

‘I will not allow you to say another word,’ replied the Major, cutting in on a pause made by Théodore to note the effect of his speech. ‘My choice is fixed.’

‘Then we have hit on the same idea!’ cried Théodore. ‘Well-meaning men are as likely to jump together as great wits.’

‘I do not think that has happened this time,’ said Phellion. ‘This district has hitherto been represented on the Town Council by the very best of men, who was also the most admirable of lawyers — the late Monsieur Popinot, who died Councillor of State. When he was to be replaced, his nephew, who inherits his beneficence, was not at the time a resident in this quarter, but since then he has purchased and moved into the house that was his uncle’s in the Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève; he is physician to the École Polytechnique and to one of our hospitals. He is an ornament to the district; and for these reasons, and to honour the uncle’s memory in the person of his nephew, I

and some other residents have resolved to work for the election of Dr. Horace Bianchon, member of the Academy of Sciences, as you know, and one of the rising glories of the great Paris School of Medicine. We do not think a man great solely because he is famous ; the late Council-lor Popinot was, in my opinion, almost the equal of Saint Vincent de Paul.'

'A physician is not an administrator,' replied Théodore. 'Besides, I have come to claim your vote for a man for whose sake your nearest interests demand the sacrifice of a selection which, after all, has nothing to do with the public welfare.'

'Oh, Monsieur !' cried Phellion, rising and striking an attitude like Lafon in *Le Glorieux*, 'have you such a contempt for me as to suppose that personal interest could ever influence my political conscience ? When the commonwealth is in question, I am neither more nor less than a citizen.'

La Peyrade smiled as he thought of the conflict about to take place between the 'citizen' and the father.

'Do not pledge yourself too sternly to your convictions, I beg,' said he, 'for your beloved Félix's happiness is in the balance.'

'What do you mean to convey by those words ?' asked Phellion, pausing in the middle of the drawing-room, his right hand slipped within his waistcoat over his heart — a favourite position with the famous Odilon Barrot.

'I have come on behalf of our common friend, our worthy and admirable friend, Monsieur Thuillier, whose influence over the destinies of charming Céleste Colleville is well known to you. And if, as I believe, your son, — a young man whose indisputable merit might make any family proud, — if he is courting Céleste with a view to a marriage in every respect suitable, you cannot do better, to secure the eternal gratitude of the Thuilliers, than commend our worthy friend to the suffrages of your fellow-citizens.'

I, for my part, though but lately settled in the neighbourhood, might take it on myself to do this, for some little benefits done to the poorer class have secured me a certain amount of influence ; but services to the poor do not count for much in the estimation of those who are more highly taxed ; besides, the obscurity of my life is not in harmony with any such demonstration. I have devoted myself, Monsieur, to the service of the humblest, like the late Judge Popinot, a truly sublime man, as you say ; and if my vocation were not, as it is, in a certain sense religious, and so far antagonistic to the demands of married life, my taste, my ultimate destiny, would be the service of God and the Church.

‘I make no fuss, like the sham philanthropists ; I do not write — I work, for I have simply devoted my life to the exercise of Christian charity. I fancy I have guessed what is the ambition of our friend Thuillier, and I wished to promote the happiness of two beings made for each other by suggesting to you the means of finding your way to his heart — a somewhat cold one.’

Phellion was quite overpowered by this harangue, which was very cleverly spoken ; he was dazzled, startled, but he was the same Phellion still ; he advanced to the lawyer and held out his hand. La Peyrade took it. They shook hands with effusion — such a grasp as was often exchanged in August, 1830, between a citizen and a man on his promotion.

‘Monsieur,’ said the Major, with feeling. ‘I had misjudged you. What you have done me the honour to confide to me will die here,’ and he laid his hand on his heart. ‘You are one of those men — and they are few — who console us for many woes inherent in our social scheme. Real worth is so rarely met with that our weak judgment distrusts appearances. In me you have a friend, if you will allow me to do myself the honour of assuming the title. ‘But you must learn to know me, Monsieur ; I should

sacrifice my self-respect by proposing Thuillier. No, my son must never owe his happiness to an evil deed of his father's. I will not transfer my vote to another candidate because it is to my son's interest. That, Monsieur, is true virtue !'

La Peyrade took out his handkerchief, rubbed it into his eye, and extracted a tear. Then, holding out his hand to Phellion, while he turned his face aside :—

'That, Monsieur, is the sublime aspect of political life in the conflict with private feeling !' said he. 'If I had come only to witness this spectacle, my visit would not be time wasted. What can I say ? In your place I would do the same. You are the noblest work of God — an honest man ! A citizen on Rousseau's model ! With more citizens of this stamp, O France, my native land ! what might you not become ! It is I, Monsieur, who crave to be allowed to call myself your friend.'

'What can be going on ?' cried Madame Phellion, watching the scene from outside through the window. 'Your father and that monster of a man are in each other's arms.' Phellion and the lawyer now went out to join the family in the garden.

'My dear Félix,' said the father, pointing to la Peyrade, who bowed low to Madame Phellion, 'be grateful to this worthy gentleman ; he will be helpful rather than mischievous to your interests.'

The lawyer walked for five minutes under the leafless lime-trees with Madame Phellion and Madame Barniol, giving them some advice, which, in the serious dilemma to which Phellion's obstinacy had given rise, was to bear fruit that evening, while its first happy result was to make both the ladies admirers of his talents, candour, and inestimable high qualities.

The whole family in a body accompanied the young advocate to the gate on the street, and every eye watched him till he had turned the corner of the Rue Saint-Jacques.

Madame Phellion took her husband's arm as they went indoors, and said : —

‘ What possesses you, my dear, you, such a good father, to risk the very best match our Félix could make out of an extravagant sense of delicacy ? ’

‘ My dear little woman,’ replied Phellion, ‘ the great men of antiquity, such as Brutus and others, were not fathers when they were bound to be citizens first. The middle class, even far more than the aristocracy, whose place it is called upon to take, is expected to exercise the highest virtues. Monsieur de Saint-Hilaire thought nothing of the loss of his arm when he saw Turenne dead.

‘ We, too, have to show our quality ; we must do so in every grade of the social hierarchy. Shall I inculcate these principles in my family only to betray them at the moment for proving them ? No. Weep, my dear, to-day, if you will ; you will esteem me to-morrow ! ’ he added, as he saw tears in the eyes of his skinny little wife.

These grandiloquent words were spoken on the threshold of the door over which was inscribed *Aurea Mediocritas*.

‘ I ought to have added : *et digna*,’ said Phellion, pointing to the tablet, ‘ but that the words would imply praise.’

‘ But, father,’ said Marie-Théodore Phellion, the engineer student, when they were all in the drawing-room again, ‘ it does not seem to me that a man fails in honour when he changes his opinion in the matter of a choice which is in itself unimportant to the public good.’

‘ Unimportant, my dear son ! ’ cried Phellion. ‘ Between ourselves — and Félix is of my opinion — Monsieur Thuillier is a man devoid of capacity of any kind. He knows nothing ! Monsieur Horace Bianchon is a man of great ability ; he will get many things done for our district, and Thuillier never a thing ! But, above all, my son, remember that to give up a good resolution for a bad one out of interested motives is an infamous action, which may escape the criticism of men, but which God will punish. I am,

or I believe I am, clear of blame before my own conscience, and I owe it to you all to leave you an unblemished memory. Nothing can alter my decision.'

'Oh, my dear good father!' cried little Madame Barniol, throwing herself on her knees on a stool by her father's side. 'Do not mount your high horse. There are plenty of fools and idiots in the Municipal Council, and France goes on all the same. Worthy old Thuillier will vote with the majority. Remember, Céleste will have five hundred thousand francs, perhaps.'

'She may have millions,' said Phellion, 'and I would let them lie. I will not propose Thuillier when it is my duty to the memory of the best man that ever lived to nominate Horace Bianchon. From his seat in heaven Popinot looks down on me and approves!' cried Phellion, with enthusiasm. 'It is by such base considerations as these that France is degraded and the citizen class brought into contempt.'

'My father is right,' said Félix, rousing himself from a brown study, 'and he deserves our respect and affection, as he always has done in the course of his unpretentious, busy, and honoured life. I could not bear to owe my happiness to any remorse in his noble soul, nor to any intrigue. I love Céleste as much as I love my family, but above all else I place my father's honour; and the moment the affair is a question of conscience to him, let no more be said.'

Phellion, his eyes full of tears, went up to his eldest son, and clasping him in his arms he exclaimed in a broken voice:—

'My son, my son!'

'All this is stuff and nonsense,' said Madame Phellion to her daughter in an undertone. 'Come and dress me; we must put an end to this. I know your father; he is pig-headed. To carry out the plan suggested to us by that good and pious young man I shall need your support, Théodore. Be ready, my son.'

Just then Geneviève came in and handed a note to Monsieur Phellion senior.

'An invitation to dinner at the Thuilliers, for my wife, myself, and Félix,' said he.

The magnificent and startling scheme evolved by the advocate of the poor had upset the Thuilliers as much as the Phelliens; and Jérôme, without telling his sister anything, for he already felt on his honour to his Mephistopheles, went to her room in a great bustle to say:—

'Good little woman,'—he always appealed to her feelings in these words,—'we shall have some big-wigs to dinner this evening. I am going to ask the Minards; so give us a good dinner. I am writing to invite Monsieur and Madame Phellion; it is a little late, but we are on no ceremony with them. As to the Minards, I must invent some civil excuse; I happen to want them.'

'Four Minards, three Phelliens, four Collevilles, and ourselves—thirteen.'

'La Peyrade fourteen, and it will be as well to invite Dutocq; he may be of service to us. I will go up to his rooms.'

'What are you brewing?' cried his sister; 'fifteen to dinner, a matter of forty francs at least, sent flying!'

'Do not regret the money, my good little woman; and above all be as sweet as you can to our young friend la Peyrade. He is something like a friend! And he will prove it. If you love me, cherish him as the apple of your eye.'

And he left Brigitte bewildered.

'Yes, and I will wait till he proves it!' said she to herself. 'I am not to be caught by fine words; not I! He is a pleasant youth enough, but I must have studied him a little closer before wearing him next my heart.'

After inviting Dutocq, Thuillier, who had beautified himself, went off to the Rue des Maçons-Sorbonne, to the

Minard's house, where he had to bamboozle Zélie and disguise the fact that the invitation was an impromptu.

Minard had bought one of the vast and sumptuous dwellings which the religious orders built in the vicinity of the Sorbonne; and, as he mounted a broad stone staircase, with a balustrade that showed how well the artistic crafts had flourished in the days of Louis XIII., Thuillier coveted the Mayor's residence and position.

This handsome house, with a garden behind and court-yard in front of it, was striking from the stamp, at once elegant and dignified, of that king's reign, the happy medium between the bad taste of the decaying renaissance and the splendour of the early days of Louis XVIII. This transition may be seen in many public buildings; massive scrolls, as on the façade of the Sorbonne, and columns in strictly Greek proportions, are characteristic of this style of architecture.

A retired grocer, a successful cheat, here occupied the place of the ecclesiastical director of an institution formerly known as the *Economat*, a foundation in connection with the general administration of the French clerical body, and due to Richelieu's foresight and acumen.

Thuillier's name opened the doors of a drawing-room where, amid red velvet and gilding and the most gorgeous products of the East, a hapless woman sat enthroned, who, by sheer weight, crushed the spirits of the princes and princesses at every 'popular' ball given at the Tuilleries.

'Is she not a perfect caricature?' said a pseudo-lady of the bed-chamber one evening to a duchess, who could not help laughing as she saw Zélie, bedizened with diamonds, as red as a poppy, squeezed into a spangled dress, and rolling like one of the barrels out of her own forgotten shop.

'Can you forgive me, lady fair,' said Thuillier, with a wriggle ending in the second attitude of his 1807 series, 'for having left this invitation on my desk, believing that I had sent it? It is for to-day — perhaps I am too late.'

Zélie consulted her husband's face as he came forward to shake hands with Thuillier, and said : —

‘ We were going to look at a country house and dine hap-hazard at an eating-house, but we can give it up ; for my part, all the more readily because I think it deuced common to go out of town of a Sunday.’

‘ We will get up a little hop for the young folks, if there are enough of us ; and I quite expect it, for I have left a note for Phellion, whose wife is on intimate terms with Madame Prou, the successor — ’

‘ The successress,’ Madame Minard put in.

‘ Nay,’ replied Thuillier, ‘ it would be the successoress — as we say the Mayoress — of Mademoiselle Lagrave. She was a Barniol.’

‘ Must I dress ? ’ asked Madame Minard.

‘ I should think not, indeed ! ’ cried Thuillier. ‘ My sister would give me a fine scolding. No, it is a family affair. Under the Empire, Madame, we made acquaintance by dancing together. In those glorious days a good dancer was as much valued as a good soldier. Nowadays people are too unromantic.’

‘ We will not talk politics,’ said the Mayor, smiling. ‘ The King is a great man and very clever. I live in constant admiration of our own times and the institutions we have made for ourselves. The King knows what he is about in developing our industries ; he is struggling hand to hand with England, and this fruitful peace is giving him more to do than all the wars of the Empire.’

‘ What a member Minard would make ! ’ exclaimed Zélie artlessly. ‘ He tries speaking when we are alone, — and you would help to get him returned, would not you, Thuillier ? ’

‘ We are not to talk politics,’ replied Thuillier. ‘ We shall see you then, at five ? ’

‘ Is that little Vinet to be there ? ’ asked Minard. ‘ He is looking out for Céleste, no doubt.’

'Then he may wear the willow,' replied Thuillier; 'Brigitte will not hear of him.'

Zelie and Minard exchanged a glance of satisfaction.

'To think that we have to bemean ourselves with those people for our boy's sake!' cried Zelie, when Thuillier was going down the stairs to which the Mayor had seen him.

'Aha, so you want to be Deputy, do you?' said Thuillier, as he departed. 'Nothing will satisfy these grocers. Dear me, dear me! What would Napoleon say to seeing power in such hands! I, at any rate, know something of office. What a rival! What will la Peyrade say to that?'

The ambitious ex-clerk went to invite the whole of the Laudigeois family to join them in the evening, and then called on the Collevilles to make sure of Céleste's being nicely dressed.

He found Flavie somewhat pensive; she hesitated about accepting, and Thuillier had to persuade her.

'My old and ever-young friend,' said he, putting his arm round her waist, for they were alone in her room, 'I can have no secrets from you. A matter very important to me is in the wind. I must say no more, but I may ask you to be particularly fascinating to a certain young man—'

'Which?'

'Young la Peyrade.'

'But, Charles, why?'

'He holds my future prospects in his hands; besides, he is a man of genius. Oh, I know one when I see him. He has *that*—' and Thuillier gave his hand a twist like a dentist drawing a back tooth. 'We must secure him, Flavie! But above all do not let us show our hand or allow him to detect the secret of his strength. Between him and me it is to be give and take.'

'Well, then,' Flavie asked, 'am I to flirt with him?'

'Not too much, my angel,' said Thuillier, fatuously:

And he went off quite unobservant of the sort of amazement that had come over Flavie.

'This young man is a power!' said she to herself.  
'Well, we shall see.'

And so she had her hair dressed with marabout feathers; she put on her pretty grey and pink gown, showed her fine shoulders through a black mantilla, and took care that Céleste should appear in a simple silk frock with a high tucker and pleated collar, and with her hair dressed in plaited loops.

At half-past four Théodore was at his post. He had assumed his most vacuous and almost servile manner, and his softest tones; he first went into the garden with Thuillier.

'My friend,' said he, 'I have not a doubt of your success, but I feel that I must once more impress on you the need for absolute secrecy. If you should be questioned on any point, especially about Céleste, give such evasive replies as leave the inquirer in doubt — you must have learnt the trick of old in the office.'

'All right,' replied Thuillier. 'But are you really sure?'

'You will see the dessert I have ready for you. But above all, be diffident. Here come the Minards — leave me to hocus them. Bring them here and vanish.'

After the preliminary greetings la Peyrade took care to keep at the Mayor's elbow, and at an opportune moment he took him aside and said:—

'Monsieur le Maire, a man in your position does not come to kick his heels in this house without some end in view. I do not wish to inquire into your motives; I have not the smallest right to do so, and it is no business of mine here below to meddle with the concerns of the powers of this world; still, forgive my being so bold, and condescend to listen to a piece of advice I can give you. If I do you a service to-day you are in a position to do me two to-morrow, so if you should find that I have been of any use to you, I am really acting on the promptings of self-interest. — Our friend Thuillier is in despair at being

a nobody, and is bent on being of some importance, a personage in the district — ’

‘ Aha ! ’ said Minard.

‘ Oh, nothing great ! He wants to be elected a member of the Municipal Council. I happen to know that Phellion, foreseeing the ulterior advantage of doing him a good turn, intends to propose our poor friend as a candidate. Well, you might find it necessary to your own schemes to be beforehand with him. It can only be beneficial, I should say agreeable, to you to see Thuillier elected ; he will fill his place well at the Town Council ; there are worse men than he on the Board. And besides, as indebted to you for such advancement, he will see through your eyes ; he regards you as one of the shining lights of the Municipality — ’

‘ My dear sir, I am much obliged to you,’ said Minard. ‘ You are doing me a service which I can never sufficiently repay, and which proves — ’

‘ That I have no liking for those Phellions,’ replied la Peyrade, taking advantage of the Mayor’s hesitancy, fearing lest he should say something that the lawyer might construe as disdain. ‘ I hate men who trade on their own honesty and coin money out of fine sentiments.’

‘ You know the sort well,’ said Minard ; ‘ typical sycophants. That man’s whole life for the last ten years is accounted for by this scrap of red ribbon,’ added he, showing his own button-hole.

‘ Be careful,’ said Théodore, ‘ his son is in love with Céleste, and holds the citadel.’

‘ Aye, but my son has twelve thousand francs a year of his own — ’

‘ Ah ! ’ said the lawyer, with an emphatic shrug, ‘ Mademoiselle Brigitte said the other day that she wanted at least as much as that for Céleste. And after all, within six months’ time, you will see that Thuillier will own a free-hold worth forty thousand francs a year.’

'The deuce he will !' replied the Mayor. 'I suspected as much. Well, he shall be member of the Town Council.'

'Come what may, do not mention me,' said the advocate of the poor, hurrying forward to meet Madame Phellion — 'Well, fair lady, and have you been successful ?'

'I waited till four o'clock, but that worthy and admirable man would not allow me to speak to the end. He is too busy to accept such a charge, and Monsieur Phellion has the letter in which Monsieur Bianchon thanks him for his good intentions, and says that so far as he is concerned, he means to vote for Monsieur Thuillier. He is using all his influence in Thuillier's behalf, and begs my husband to do the same.'

'And what does your excellent husband say ?'

" "I have done my duty," he replied, " I have been true to my conscience, and now I am wholly for Thuillier." "

'Well, then, everything is settled,' said la Peyrade. 'Forget my visit ; the whole credit of the idea is yours.'

He then turned to Madame Colleville, assuming an expression of deep respect.

'Madame,' said he, 'be so kind as to bring our good Papa Colleville this way ; we have a little surprise for Thuillier, and he must be let into the secret.'

While la Peyrade was playing a part for Colleville's benefit, and indulging in very sparkling pleasantries while explaining the position and persuading him that he ought to support Thuillier's nomination, if only out of family feeling, Flavie, in the drawing-room, was listening to the following remarks, which quite mystified her ; her ears tingled.

'I should like to know what Monsieur Colleville and Monsieur de la Peyrade are saying that makes them laugh so much,' observed Madame Thuillier vapidly, as she looked through the window.

'They are talking such nonsense as men do when they get together,' replied Mademoiselle Thuillier, who often abused men out of a sort of instinct natural in old maids.

'He is incapable of such a thing,' said Phellion gravely. 'Monsieur de la Peyrade is one of the most virtuous young men I have ever met. Every one knows how highly I think of Félix; well, I put them on the same line; nay, I could even wish that my son had a little of the graceful piety that characterises Monsieur Théodore!'

'He is, indeed, a man of high merit, and sure to get on,' said Minard. 'For my part, he has quite won my good opinion—I will not say my protection—'

'He spends more on lamp-oil than on bread,' said Dutocq; 'that I know.'

'His mother must be proud of him, if he is so happy as still to have a mother,' said Madame Phellion sententiously.

'To us he is a perfect treasure,' added Thuillier, 'and so modest, too; he never puts himself forward.'

'I can answer for one thing,' said Dutocq, 'and that is that no young fellow ever maintained a more dignified attitude in poverty—and he has lived through it; but he has suffered, that is very plain.'

'Poor young man!' cried Zélie; 'oh, such things make my heart ache!'

'You may trust him with your secrets and your fortune,' said Thuillier, 'and that, in these days, is the utmost that can be said of any man.'

'It is Colleville who is making him laugh,' cried Dutocq.

Colleville and la Peyrade were just coming down the garden, the best of friends.

'Gentlemen,' said Brigitte, 'soup and the King must not be kept waiting; hand in the ladies.'

Five minutes after this pleasant jest, an inheritance from the porter's lodge, Brigitte had the satisfaction of seeing round her table the principal personages of this drama, who were all, in fact, presently to appear in her drawing-room, with the exception of the dreadful Céritet.

The portrait of the retired cash-bag maker would perhaps be inadequate without a detailed account of one of her

best dinners. The characteristics of the middle-class cook of 1840 form one of the items necessary to a history of manners, and clever housekeepers may find a lesson in the description. A woman does not make empty bags for twenty years without considering the means of filling one or two. Now there was this peculiarity in Brigitte: she combined the thrift which lays the foundation of wealth with an intelligent sense for needful outlay. Her comparative extravagance, when her brother or Céleste was concerned, was the very antipodes of avarice. Indeed, she often pitied herself for not being miserly. At the last dinner she had given she had told the guests how, after holding out for ten minutes and going through perfect misery, she had ended by giving ten francs to a work-woman in the neighbourhood who had not, she knew, had any food for two days.

‘Nature,’ said she, artlessly, ‘was stronger than reason.’

The soup was *bouillon*, stock of the palest hue; for even on an occasion such as this the cook was enjoined to make plenty of it, and besides, as the beef was to supply the family board on the next day and the next, the less it yielded of its juices to the stock, the more substantial it would be.

The boiled beef, not overdone, was always removed at these words, pronounced by Brigitte, while Thuillier cut the meat:—

‘I am afraid it is a little hard; never mind, Thuillier, no one will eat any of it; we have other things to fall back on.’

The dish was, in fact, flanked by four others standing on hot-plates of copper, with the plating worn off.

At this dinner, which came to be called the *candidate’s* dinner, the first course consisted of a pair of ducks *aux olives*, and oppositely, a pasty of veal quenelles, with an eel à la tartare, and a fricandeau on endive to correspond.

The principal dish of the second course was a magnifi-

cent roast goose, stuffed with chestnuts; a dish of corn salad, ornamented with discs of scarlet beet-root, a dish of custards in glasses, and a timbale of macaroni.

This dinner — worthy to be a porter's wedding banquet — cost twenty francs at most; the remains would feed the family for two days, and Brigitte would say: —

‘*Dame!* When you have company the money flies! It is frightful!’

The table was lighted by two hideous plated candlesticks with four branches, in which twinkled the inexpensive composition candles known as *Aurore*. The linen was dazzlingly white, and the old thread-pattern plate was part of the paternal inheritance — purchases made by old Thuillier at the time of the Revolution for use in the sort of unlicensed eating-house he had kept in his lodge, an institution suppressed in all the offices in 1816.

Thus the fare was in keeping with the dining-room, with the house, and with the Thuilliers, who were fated not to rise superior to this standard. The Minards, the Collevilles, and la Peyrade exchanged a smile or two, betraying a common thought, satirical, but suppressed. They alone knew of any superior class of luxury, and the Minards plainly showed that they must have some ulterior motive in accepting such a dinner. La Peyrade, who sat next to Flavie, said in her ear: —

‘You must confess that they want some one to give them a lesson in living, and that you and Colleville are eating what is called *Cag-mag* — a familiar dish with me! But those Minards! What horrible greed of money! Your daughter would be lost to you for ever; such *parvenus* have all the vices of the aristocrats of a past time without any of their elegance. Their son, who has twelve hundred francs a year of his own, may surely find a wife in the Potasse set without their drawing their speculative rake over this field. What fun it is to play upon such folks, as if they were a bass or a clarinet!’

Flavie listened with a smile, and did not withdraw her foot when Théodore lightly pressed it with his boot.

'To understand what is going on,' said he, 'let us communicate by the pedal. You must know me thoroughly since this morning; I am not the man to play any trumpery tricks—'

Flavie had not been spoilt in the matter of superiority; the man's decisive and easy tone dazzled the woman to whom he, with skilful sleight of hand, had presented such an option as placed her between *yes* and *no*. She must take him or leave him, and as his conduct was the outcome of deep calculation, he watched with a softened glance, but keenly sagacious observation, the effects of his fascinations.

As the dishes of the second course were being removed, Minard, fearing lest Phellion should be the first in the field, said, very solemnly, to Thuillier:—

'My dear Thuillier, when I accepted your invitation it was because I have an important communication to make to you, which does you so much honour that I feel that all your guests must be my witnesses.'

Thuillier turned pale.

'You have procured me the Cross of the Legion of Honour?' he exclaimed, eager to prove that he was not lacking in intuition, as Théodore gave him a look.

'You will have that, too, some day,' replied the Mayor. 'But this is something better. The Cross is a favour dependent on the good-will of a Minister, whereas at this moment what I have to propose to you depends on election by the common consent of your fellow-citizens. In short, a considerable number of the electors of this district have cast their eyes on you to honour you with their confidence as representing the district on the Municipal Council of Paris, that is to say, as we all know, the head council of the Seine—'

'Bravo!' said Dutoca.

Phellion rose.

‘Monsieur, the Mayor has anticipated me,’ said he, with emotion. ‘But it is so flattering to our friend to find himself the object of such eager respect on the part of so many good citizens, and to receive votes from all parts of the capital at once, that I cannot lament the fact of coming only second in the field — and besides, I yield to the authorities,’ and he bowed respectfully to Minard. ‘Yes, Môsieur Thuillier, several electors were thinking of electing you in that part of the district where I have set up my humble Penates, and there is this especially in your favour: you were suggested to them by a very distinguished man (*sensation*), by a man through whom we had proposed to do honour to one of the most admirable residents in this municipal district, who, for twenty years, was the father of its people. I mean the late Monsieur Popinot, in his lifetime Councillor of State, and our representative on the Town Council of Paris. But his nephew, Dr. Bianchon, one of our most distinguished residents, has declined the responsibilities of such a post, in view of his absorbing avocations; but, while thanking us for the compliment, he himself — note the point — recommended the Mayor’s selection to our suffrages as being, from his experience in the post he formerly filled, peculiarly capable of exercising the functions of an ædile! ’

And Phellion sat down amid a murmur of acclamation.

‘Thuillier, you may rely on me as an old friend,’ said Colleville.

The guests were all touched by the spectacle presented by old Brigitte and Madame Thuillier. Brigitte, as pale as if she were about to faint, let the slow tears trickle down her cheeks — tears of unutterable joy; and Madame Thuillier sat with a fixed gaze as if thunderstruck. Suddenly Brigitte sprang up and flew into the kitchen, crying out to Joséphine: —

‘Come to the cellar, girl; I must have out some of the wine from behind the faggots.’

'My friends,' said Thuillier with emotion, 'this is the proudest day of my life — happier than that of my election, if I consent indeed to allow myself to be nominated for the suffrages of my fellow-citizens' (cries of '*Yes, yes!*'), 'for I feel that thirty years of service have told upon me, and, as you will understand, a man of honour must consider his strength and capabilities before assuming the functions of an ædile —'

'I expected no less from you, Monsieur Thuillier!' cried Phellion. 'Oh! I beg your pardon; I never in my life before interrupted any one — and a man who was my superior, too! But there are circumstances —'

'Accept, accept!' cried Zélie. 'The deuce is in it! But we want just such men as you to govern us!'

'Resign yourself to your fate, my good sir,' said Dutocq, 'and long live the Councillor elect! But we have nothing to drink —'

'So that is settled,' said Minard. 'You are our nominee?'

'You take my merits very largely for granted,' replied Thuillier.

'What next!' said Colleville. 'Why, a man who has served in the galleys of the Exchequer office for thirty years is invaluable on the Town Council!'

'You are far too modest,' said young Minard. 'Your capabilities are well known to us; they are remembered in the office as a precedent.'

'Well, on your own heads be it!' said Thuillier.

'The King will be delighted at the selection, that I can promise you,' said Minard, drawing himself up.

'Gentlemen,' said la Peyrade, 'will you allow a junior resident of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques to make one remark which is not unimportant?'

The conviction they all shared of the young advocate's merits secured complete silence.

'The influence exerted by Monsieur Minard as Mayor

of the adjoining district, immense as it is in ours also, where his memory is held dear ; that of Monsieur Phellion, the oracle — yes, it is the truth — ' said he at an apologetic gesture from Phellion — ' the oracle of his battalion ; that, no less important, which Monsieur Colleville owes to the urbanity and frankness of his manners ; that of Monsieur Dutocq, clerk to the justice of the peace, which will be not less valuable ; and the humble efforts I may make in my narrow sphere of labours are a guarantee of success. But success is not all ! To insure a speedy triumph, we must all pledge ourselves to the most absolute secrecy as to what has just taken place here. Otherwise, without intending or knowing it, we should excite envy and meaner passions which would presently give rise to obstacles to be surmounted. The political feeling of our new social organisation, nay, its very basis, — its symbol and the condition of its existence, — lies in a certain division of power with the middle class, that being the true force of modern social life, the focus of the moral sense, of wholesome feeling, of intelligent industry ; and we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the principle of election, now applied to almost every State function, has carried ambitious aspiration and the mania for becoming "Somebody" — excuse the hornly word — down to social depths which they ought never to have stirred.

' Some persons see good in this, some only evil ; it would ill become me to decide the question in the presence of those to whose superior judgment I bow. It is enough to state it, to show the danger to which our friend's flag may be exposed. It is hardly a week since the decease of our representative on the Municipal Council, and the district is already effervescent with petty ambitions. Every one pushes to the front at whatever cost. The writ for election may not be issued for another month, and between this and then what intrigues we shall see ! Do not, I entreat you, let us expose our friend Thuillier to the lash of

his competitors. Do not abandon him to public discussion, the modern Harpy, which is but the mouth-piece of calumny and envy, the pretext snatched at by inimical feeling to decry all that is great, to besmirch all that is respectable, to dishonour all that is sacred. No, let us do as the third party does in the Chamber: let us say nothing, but vote !'

'He speaks well,' said Phellion to his neighbour, Dutocq.

'And sound sense, too!'

Minard junior was yellow and green with envy.

'Very true, and very well put!' exclaimed the elder Minard.

'Unanimously carried,' said Colleville. 'Gentlemen, we are all men of honour; it is enough that we are agreed on this point.'

'Those who mean to win must note which way the wind blows,' said Phellion sententiously.

At this juncture Mademoiselle Thuillier reappeared on the scene, followed by the two maids. The cellar key was tucked through her belt, and three bottles of champagne, three bottles of old Hermitage, and a bottle of Malaga were placed on the table. But she herself carried a little humpbacked bottle, like an ancient fairy Carabosse, which, with almost reverent care, she placed on the table before her. In the midst of the hilarity caused by this lavish expenditure of choice wines, the result of her gratitude, and a damning reflection on her usual stinted hospitality, a number of dessert dishes were brought in; piles of figs, raisins, prunes, and almonds, pyramids of oranges, preserves, and candied fruits, brought out of the depths of her store closet, which would never have figured on the table but for this great occasion.

'Céleste,' said she, to her sister-in-law, 'they will bring you a bottle of brandy, bought by my father in 1802; make an orange salad! Monsieur Phellion, open the champagne; that bottle is for you three. Monsieur

Dutocq, take another. Monsieur Colleville, you, who are so clever at making a cork fly! —'

The maids set champagne glasses, claret glasses, and small glasses, and Joséphine brought in three more bottles of Bordeaux.

'Of the comet-year!' exclaimed Thuillier. 'Gentlemen, you have turned my sister's brain.'

'Punch and cakes this evening,' said she. 'I have sent out to buy some tea at the druggist's. Dear me! If I had known that there was an election in the wind,' she added, turning to her sister-in-law, 'I would have had a turkey.'

The speech was greeted with hearty laughter.

'Oh! but we have had a goose,' said Minard the younger, laughing.

'It never rains but it pours!' said Madame Thuillier, as she saw meringues and *marrons glacés* handed round.

Mademoiselle Thuillier's face was on fire; she was a sublime sight: a sister's affection never found a more frenzied expression.

'To us who know her, it is really pathetic!' exclaimed Madame Colleville.

The glasses were filled, the guests looked at each other, they seemed to await a toast. La Peyrade spoke:—

'Gentlemen, let us drink to a sublime creature!' Every one sat amazed. 'To Mademoiselle Brigitte!'

They rose, they clinked glasses, they cried 'Health to Mademoiselle Thuillier!' so certainly can the expression of genuine feeling strike an enthusiastic response.

'Gentlemen,' said Phellion, consulting a pencilled slip of paper, 'To Industry and its splendid reward, in the person of our old friend, now one of the Mayors of Paris—to Monsieur Minard and his lady!'

Then, after five minutes of general conversation, Thuillier rose, and said:—

'Gentlemen—The King and the Royal Family; I say no more; their names are all-sufficient.'

‘To my brother’s election !’ said Mademoiselle ThUILIER.

‘Now I will make you laugh,’ la Peyrade whispered to Flavie, and he rose. ‘To the ladies ! To the bewitching sex to whom we owe so much happiness, irrespective of our mothers, sisters, and wives.’

This toast provoked much merriment, and Colleville, already cheerful, remarked : —

‘You wretch, you have taken the words out of my mouth.’

The Mayor rose ; perfect silence reigned.

‘Gentlemen, To our Institutions ! In them lie the strength and greatness of dynastic France !’

The bottles were emptied amid a chorus of admiration of the astonishing excellence and fine quality of the wine.

Presently, Céleste Colleville said shyly : —

‘Mamma, will you allow me to propose a toast ?’

The poor child had observed her godmother’s puzzled face — the mistress of the house, utterly overlooked, wearing the expression almost of a dog not knowing which master to follow, looking from her terrible sister-in-law to her husband, studying their countenances, forgetting herself. Still the gladness mingling with the crushed expression of the poor woman, who was accustomed to count for nothing, to suppress every idea and every emotion, had the effect of winter sunshine through the mist, grudgingly shining through the flabby, faded features. The gauze cap, with its dark-hued flowers, the ill-dressed hair, the drab-grey gown, with no ornament whatever but a thick gold chain ; everything, even her attitude, appealed to the younger Céleste’s feelings, for she alone in all the world knew the true worth of this woman shut up in silence, who saw all that was going forward, and, enduring all things, found comfort only in her godchild and in God.

‘Let the dear child propose her little toast,’ said la Peyrade to Flavie.

'Speak away, my child,' cried Colleville; 'we still have the Hermitage to finish, and it is A 1, I can tell you.'

'To my kind god-mamma!' said the girl, holding out her glass, with a pretty bow, to Madame Thuillier.

The poor woman, quite scared, looked through a gush of tears alternately at her husband and her sister; but her position in the family was so well known, and this homage from youth and beauty to weakness was so touching, that every one felt its pathos; the men all rose and bowed to Madame Thuillier.

'Oh! Céleste, I wish I had a kingdom to lay at your feet!' said Félix Phellion.

His good old father wiped away a tear, and Dutocq, even, was touched.

'She is a dear child!' said Mademoiselle Thuillier, getting up and going round to embrace her sister-in-law.

'Now, it is my turn!' said Colleville, assuming a heroic attitude. 'Listen to me: To Friendship! Empty your glasses. Fill them again. Now: To the Fine Arts! the flower of social life! Empty your glasses! Fill them up again! To our meeting at just such another dinner the day after the election!'

'What is that little bottle?' Dutocq asked Mademoiselle Thuillier.

'That,' said she, 'is one of my three bottles of liqueur from Madame Amphoux; the second is for Céleste's wedding; the third for the christening of her first child.'

'My sister's brain is almost turned,' said Thuillier to Colleville.

The dinner was brought to an end by a toast from Thuillier at a hint from Théodore, at the moment when the Malaga shone in the small glasses like so many rubies.

'Colleville, gentlemen,' said he, 'drank to Friendship. I, in this noble liquor, drink to my Friends.'

A cordial cheer responded to this sentimental speech;

but, as Dutocq said to Théodore, ‘It was murder to give such Malaga to be poured down such vulgar throats.’

‘If we could but imitate this, my dear,’ cried Madame Minard, making her glass ring by her way of sucking down the Spanish wine, ‘what a fortune we might make !’

Zélie was at the climax of incandescence; she was really alarming.

‘Why,’ replied Minard, ‘ours is made already.’

‘Do you think with me,’ said Brigitte to Madame Thuillier, ‘that we had better take coffee in the drawing-room ?’

Madame Thuillier, in obedience, or as feigning to be the mistress of the house, rose at once.

‘You are a great magician,’ said Flavie to la Peyrade, as she took his arm to return from the dining-room to the drawing-room.

‘I do not aim at witchcraft over any one but you,’ he replied. ‘And on my word, it is only fair revenge; you are more bewitching than ever to-day.’

‘Thuillier !’ she exclaimed to avoid a contest, ‘Thuillier ! fancying himself a political figure !’

‘But, dear heart, in this world half of the ridiculous figures we see are the product of some such plotting. Men themselves are less guilty in this way than they are commonly supposed to be. In how many houses do you find the husband, the children, the intimates of the family, all agreeing to persuade an exceedingly silly mother that she is witty, or a woman of fifty that she is young and lovely ? This leads to infinite annoyance for the indifferent bystanders. One man’s revolting foppishness is due to the idolatry of a mistress; another owes his belief that he can write verse to flatterers who are paid to make him fancy himself a poet. Every household has its great man, and the result — as in the Chamber — is general darkness,

in spite of all those shining lights of France. Men of real talent only laugh among themselves ; that is all.

‘ You are the wit and beauty of this little vulgar world ; that is what brought me to your feet. But my second thought was to drag you out of it, for I love you truly — and as a friend rather than a lover, though a good deal of love has stolen in,’ he added, pressing her to his heart under shelter of the window recess into which he had led her.

‘ Madame Phellion will preside at the piano,’ said Colleville. ‘ Everybody must dance this evening : the bottles, Brigitte’s franc-pieces, and all the little girls ! I will run home and fetch my clarinet.’ And he handed his empty coffee-cup to his wife, smiling to see that she and Théodore were such good friends.

‘ What have you done to my husband ? ’ asked Flavie of the seducer.

‘ Am I to tell you all our secrets ? ’

‘ Oh ! then you don’t love me,’ said she with the coquettish slyness of a woman on the verge of yielding.

‘ Well, since you tell me all yours,’ said he, giving the rein to the spirit of the hour under cover of Provençal gaiety, — always charming and apparently so natural, — ‘ I cannot conceal from you one pang of my heart.’

He led her back to the window, and went on with a smile : ‘ Colleville, poor man, saw in me an artist crushed by all these commonplace people, silent in their presence because I was misunderstood, undervalued, and outcast ; but he felt the heat of the fire that is consuming me. Yes,’ he added, in a tone of intense conviction, ‘ for I am an artist in speech after the pattern of Berryer ; I could make a jury weep while I wept myself, for I am as nervous as a woman. Then your husband, who has a horror of all these people, made game of them with me ; at first we laughed, but then growing serious he found me fully his match. I confided to him our plan for making some-

thing of Thuillier, and I showed him all he would gain by working a political puppet. "If it were only," said I, "to be called *de* Colleville, and to place your charming wife in the position in which I should like to see her,—in some good revenue office,—and then you could get yourself elected to the Chamber; for in order to achieve all you ought to become, you would only have to spend a few years in one of the departments—high Alps or lower Alps—in some hole of a town where every one would adore you, and your wife would fascinate every living soul. And such a place," added I, "will be easy to get, especially if you marry your sweet Céleste to a man who has any influence in Parliament." Now common sense disguised as a jest can make a far deeper impression on some natures than it does unaided, so Colleville and I are the best friends in the world. Did not he say at table, "Wretch, you took the words out of my mouth!"? By the end of the evening, we shall say *tu* and *toi*. And then, a little party such as always tempts artists who have been broken in to domestic rule to kick over the traces, and to which I will make him come with me, will crown the matter. We shall be as good friends as he and Thuillier are—or better—for I have told him that Thuillier will be bursting with envy when he sees him with a rosette.

"This, my adored one, is what a serious attachment gives a man courage enough to do. Colleville will be bound to accept me, since I can only go to your house by his permission. But you could make me lick a leper, swallow live toads, seduce Brigitte; yes, I would impale my heart on that marlingspike, if I wanted her for a crutch to drag myself to your feet!"

"This morning, you frightened me — ' she began.

"And this evening you are no longer afraid? Aye," added he, "no harm can ever come to you through me!"

"You are, I must own, a most extraordinary man!"

"Not at all; my smallest, as well as my greatest, efforts

are reflections from the flame you have lighted ; and I mean to be your son-in-law, that we may never have to part. My wife, good heavens ! She will be no more than a child-bearing machine. The supreme being, the divinity, will be you,' he whispered in her ear.

' You are Satan ! ' she said with a sort of terror.

' Nay ; but I am something of a poet, like all the natives of my province. Come ! Be my Joséphine. I will call on you to-morrow at two o'clock ; I have a burning desire to see where you sleep, the furniture you use, the colour of the hangings, how things are arranged about you—to admire the pearl in its shell.'

And with these words he left her, without waiting for an answer.

Flavie, who never in her life had heard love expressed in the impassioned language of romance, remained bewildered, but happy, her heart throbbing, as she confessed to herself that it was hard indeed to resist such an influence.

Théodore had come for the first time in new trousers, grey silk socks and pumps, a black silk waistcoat and black satin cravat ; a pin in good taste sparkled on the knot. He had a new coat on of fashionable cut, and lemon kid gloves, set off by his white shirt-cuffs ; in fact, he was the only man with any style of manners or appearance in the room which was gradually filling with guests.

Madame Pron, *née* Barniol, had brought with her two schoolgirls of seventeen, entrusted to her motherly care by parents living in the islands of Bourbon and Martinique, Monsieur Pron, a professor of rhetoric in a school managed by priests, belonged to the Phellion type ; but instead of expanding on the surface in phrases and demonstrations, and constantly posing as a model, he was curt and sententious. Monsieur and Madame Pron, the cream of the Phellion circle, were at home on Mondays ; they were very intimate with the Barniols and the Phelliens. Little Monsieur Pron was a dancer, though a professor.

The high reputation of the school kept by the Demoiselles Lagrave, in which Monsieur and Madame Phellion had for twenty years been teachers, had risen even higher under the management of Mademoiselle Barniol—the most able and the earliest of their assistant mistresses. Monsieur Pron had considerable influence in that part of the district which lay between the Boulevard du Mont Parnasse, Luxembourg, and the Rue de Sèvres. So, as soon as his friend appeared, Phellion, without needing any instructions, took him by the arm and led him into a corner, where he initiated him into the great Thuillier conspiracy ; ten minutes later they both came to speak to Thuillier, and the window-bay, corresponding to that in which Flavie still stood lost in thought, was, no doubt, the scene of a trio worthy to be compared, in its way, with that of the three Swiss conspirators in *William Tell*.

‘Do you see the immaculate and honest Phellion turned intriguer?’ said Théodore to Flavie. ‘Give an honest man sufficient cause and he will wade through the dirtiest bargain ; for, you see, he has hooked on Pron, and Pron has fallen into step solely in behalf of Félix Phellion, who at this minute is arm in arm with your little Céleste. Go and separate them ; they have been together these ten minutes, and young Minard is prowling round them like an irritated bull-dog.’

Félix, still impressed by the deep emotion he had felt at Céleste’s generous impulse and heartfelt speech, when every one else had forgotten it, excepting Madame Thuillier, acted on one of those ingenuously subtle impulses which form the honest wiles of true love ; but they were new to him ; mathematics occupied his mind. He went to stand near Madame Thuillier, imagining that she would call Céleste to her side. This crafty speculation, apart from any depth of passion, was successful ; more especially because Minard the younger, regarding Céleste merely as a fortune, had not the same happy inspiration, but sipped his

coffee while talking politics to Laudigeois, Barniol, and Dutocq, by order of his father, who was looking forward to the elections of 1842.

‘Who could help loving Céleste !’ said Félix to Madame Thuillier.

‘Poor dear child ; no one in the world loves me but she,’ replied the unhappy woman, restraining her tears.

‘Nay, Madame ; there are two of us to love you,’ replied this guileless Mathieu Laensberg with a smile.

‘What are you talking about ?’ Céleste inquired, coming up to her godmother.

‘My child,’ said the pious victim, drawing the girl to her, and kissing her forehead, ‘he says you are two of you to love me.’

‘Do not scorn the bold assumption, Mademoiselle,’ said the future candidate for the Academy of Sciences ; ‘but allow me to do all in my power to realise it. It is in my nature ; injustice rouses me to revolt. Ah, the Saviour of mankind was right indeed when He promised future bliss to the meek in spirit, to the sacrificed lambs. A man who had but loved you before, Céleste, would adore you after your sublime impulse at dessert. But innocence alone can console the martyr. You are a sweet, good girl, and you will be one of those women who are the pride and joy of a family. Happy the man who shall win you.’

‘My dear godmother, through what spectacles does Monsieur Félix see me, I wonder ?’

‘He appreciates you at your true value, my angel, and I will pray Heaven for you.’

‘If you could but know,’ said Félix, ‘how happy I am to be able to do Monsieur Thuillier some little service, and how I wish I could be of use to your brother — ’

‘In short,’ said Céleste, ‘you love the whole family ?’

‘Well, yes,’ replied Félix.

True love always shrouds itself in the mystery of bashfulness, even in its mode of expressing itself, for it is its

own evidence ; it does not feel, as spurious love feels, the need for lighting a blaze ; and an observer, if he could have stolen into the Thuilliers' drawing-room, could have written a book on the two scenes he might have compared — la Peyrade's elaborate advances, and the perfect simplicity of Félix ; this was nature, that was society ; truth and falsehood face to face. Indeed, Flavie, as she saw her daughter radiating rapture from every pore of her happy face in the loveliness of a young girl gathering the first roses of an unspoken declaration, Flavie felt a pang of jealousy in her heart, and came to whisper in Céleste's ear : —

‘ You are not behaving nicely, my child ; everybody is looking at you, and you are compromising yourself by talking so long with Monsieur Félix without knowing whether we approve.’

‘ But, mamma, my godmother is here.’

‘ I beg your pardon, my dear friend,’ cried Madame Colleville, ‘ I did not see you.’

‘ Like everybody else,’ said Saint John Chrysostom.

This reply nettled Flavie, who took it as a barbed shaft ; she glanced haughtily at Félix, and said to Céleste : ‘ Sit down there, my dear,’ and seating herself by Madame Thuillier, she pointed to a chair at her side.

‘ I will work myself to death,’ said Félix to Madame Thuillier, ‘ or be made a member of the Academy of Sciences, and I will achieve some great discovery to win her by the power of fame.’

‘ Ah ! ’ thought the poor woman to herself, ‘ a gentle, quiet man of learning, like this, would have been the husband for me ! I might have developed slowly in peaceful shade. But Thou, God, wouldest not have it so. Unite and protect these two children ! They are made for each other.’

She sat pensive, listening to the witches’ clatter made by her sister-in-law, a perfect horse at hard work, who was lending a hand to the two maids clearing the table, and removing all the furniture from the dining-room, to make

way for the dancers, shouting orders all the time, like the captain on the poop of a frigate preparing for battle. ‘ Is there any currant syrup left ? Go out and get some *orgeat*. There are not enough glasses, and too little wine and water ; take the six bottles of *ordinaire* that I have just fetched up. Take care that Coffinet, the porter, does not get at it ! Caroline, you, child, must stand by the sideboard. You shall have a slice of ham if they keep it up till one in the morning. Mind that nothing is wasted ; keep an eye on everything. Give me the broom, and go to fill up the lamps ; be careful to have no accidents. Arrange the remains of the dessert so as to dress the sideboard. I wonder if my sister would ever think of helping. I can’t imagine what that dawdle finds to think about — good Heavens, how slow she is ! There, take away the chairs and they will have more room.’

The drawing-room was full of Barniols, Collevilles, Laudigeois, Phellions, and a dozen more, attracted by the rumour that had taken wind in the Luxembourg between two and four, when all the respectable inhabitants of the quarter were out walking, that there was to be dancing that evening at the Thuilliers’.

‘ Now, Brigitte, are you ready ? ’ said Colleville, rushing into the dining-room. ‘ It is nine o’clock, and they are packed into the drawing-room like herrings in a barrel. Cardot has just come with his wife, his daughter, and his future son-in-law accompanied by that young Vinet, and the whole of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine is pouring in. We must bring the piano in from the drawing-room, heh ? ’

He gave the signal by playing a few notes on his clarinet, and its inviting pipe was answered by a cheer from the drawing-room.

It is unnecessary to describe a dance of this kind. The dresses, faces, conversation, were all in harmony with one detail which will be a sufficient clew to the least lively imagination, since this one fact will show the stamp of

character and colour. Shabby trays, that had lost their varnish and paint, were handed round with common glasses of wine, wine and water, and *eau sucrée*. Others with glasses of *orgeat* and syrups appeared at much longer intervals.

There were five card-tables for twenty-five players, and eighteen couples of dancers. At one in the morning, Madame Thuillier, Mademoiselle Brigitte, and Madame Phellion and her husband were dragged into the wild performance of a country dance known as the *Boulangère*, in which Dutocq figured with his face and head wrapped up like a Khabeel Arab. The servants waiting for their masters and those belonging to the house looked on, and when this interminable round had lasted an hour, and Brigitte announced supper, they wanted to carry her in triumph; she, however, perceived the desirability of concealing a dozen bottles of Burgundy.

Everybody was so well amused, the mothers as well as the girls, that Thuillier could say:—

‘Well, we little thought this morning that we should have such fun to-night.’

‘Nothing is more enjoyable,’ said Cardot, ‘than this sort of impromptu dance. Don’t talk to me of parties to which every one comes stiff and starch.’

This view is an axiom among the middle classes.

‘Pooh !’ said Madame Minard, “I love Papa, I love Mamma.”

‘We were not saying this with reference to you, Madame; where you are pleasure dwells,’ said Dutocq.

The dance being ended Théodore dragged Dutocq away from the sideboard, where he was helping himself to a slice of tongue.

‘Come away,’ said he, ‘we must be with Cérizet the first thing in the morning to get all the information we can about the business which we must both think over. It is not so easy as Cérizet fancies.’

‘How is that?’ said Dutocq, carrying his slice of tongue to eat in the drawing-room.

‘Why, you know the laws?’

‘I know enough to be aware of any risk there may be in the matter. If the notary wishes for the house and we are beforehand with him, he has ways and means of getting it from us; he can take the name of some creditor on the schedule. In the present state of the law of mortgage, when a house is sold at the requisition of one creditor, if the price offered for it by contract is not enough to pay all the creditors, they have a right to demand that it shall be sold by auction; and the notary, if he has been caught once, will be on the alert.’

‘Well, then,’ said la Peyrade, ‘that must be seen to.’

‘Very good; we will go to talk to Cérezet.’

These words ‘talk to Cérezet,’ were overheard by young Minard, who was immediately behind the other two; but they conveyed no sense to his mind. These men were so far out of his ken, his needs, and his plans that he heard without understanding.

‘This has been one of the greatest days of our life,’ said Brigitte when, at about half-past two in the morning, she found herself alone with her brother in the deserted drawing-room. ‘What an honour to be chosen by your fellow-citizens.’

‘But make no mistake, Brigitte, we owe all this, my girl, to one man.’

‘To whom?’

‘To our friend, la Peyrade.’

It was not on the next day, Monday, but on Tuesday morning, that Dutocq and Théodore went to call on Cérezet, Dutocq having pointed out that Cérezet was always away on Sunday and Monday, taking advantage of the complete stagnation of business on these two days which the common people always devote to dissipation.

The house to which they made their way is one of the most conspicuous features of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and it is quite as important to give a description of it here as of those inhabited by Thuillier and Phellion. It is not known — to be sure, no commission has yet been appointed to go into the question — for what reason, or by what process certain quarters of Paris sink lower and lower, becoming more squalid, both morally and physically ; why the former centres of the Court and the Church-magnates, the Luxembourg, and the ‘Latin’ quarter sank to be what they now are, in spite of owning one of the finest palaces in the world, in spite of the soaring dome of Sainte-Geneviève, and that by Mansard of the Val-de-Grace, and the attractions of the Jardin des Plantes. We wonder why the graces of life are disappearing ; how it is that the houses of Vauquer and Phellion and Thuillier swarm here, and poor boarding-houses where once stood so many noble and religious dwellings ; and why mud and dirty forms of industry and poverty have settled on this hill instead of finding wider space outside the noble and ancient city ?

The angelic spirit, whose benevolence had once blessed the neighbourhood, being dead, the lowest form of money-lending has become rife. After such a man as Popinot, Cérezet had come in ; and the strange thing, noteworthy as a study of life, is that the results, socially speaking, were hardly distinguishable. Popinot lent on no interest, and could bear to lose ; Cérezet lost nothing and compelled the poorest to work hard and learn prudence. The poor had worshipped Popinot ; but they did not hate Cérezet. In this we see the lowest cog-wheel of Parisian finance. At the top are the Nucingens’ house, the Kellers, the du Tillets, the Mongenods ; a little lower come Palma, Gignonet, Gobseck ; lower still Samanou, Chabosseau, Barbet ; and beneath them all, beneath the *Mont-de-Piété*, the omnipresent usury which spreads its snares at every street corner

to entrap every form of misery, and misses none,—the spider Cérizet.

The man's braided coat has been enough already to give you a hint of the lair of this refuse of the joint-stock company and criminal court.

It was a house leprous with nitrous salts; the walls, oozy with dank sweat, were mottled all over with large patches of mildew. It stood at the corner of two streets, Rue des Postes and Rue des Poules. The ground floor was partly occupied by a wine-shop of the lowest class, painted bright red, hung with red cotton curtains, furnished with a lead-covered counter, and closed by formidable bars.

Above the door of a horrible entry hung a swing lamp on which '*Beds*' were announced. The walls were patterned with cross-clamps, showing how rickety the structure was; the tavern keeper was the owner, and occupied the entresol as well as the ground floor. The furnished rooms were let by Madame *Veuve* Poiret (*née* Michonneau), and these consisted of the first, second, and third floors, arranged to meet the purses of workmen and the very poorest students.

Cérizet had two rooms, one on the ground floor and one on the entresol, up to which he had a private staircase; the upper room had a window on a horrible paved court-yard from which rose mephitic odours. Cérizet paid the widow Poiret forty francs a month for his breakfast and dinner; he had thus conciliated the landlady by being her boarder, and the wine-shop keeper by bringing him an enormous business in wine and spirits, money turned over before the sun was up. For Master Cadenet's shop was open even before Cérizet's office, and he began business on Tuesday mornings at three in summer and at about five in winter.

The opening of the central market, the goal of many of his clients, male and female, fixed the time when his dreadful transactions began. And Cadenet, of the wine-shop, in consideration of the business he owed solely to Cérizet, let

him the two rooms for twenty-four francs a year, and had signed a lease for twelve years with the option on Céritet's part only of giving three months' notice at any time, without any compensation. Cadenet brought up a bottle of capital wine every day for his invaluable lodger's dinner; and if, at any time, Céritet were short of cash, he had only to say: 'Cadenet, my good fellow, lend me a hundred crowns.' And he always honestly repaid him.

Cadenet, it was said, had positive proof that the widow Poiret had entrusted two thousand francs to Céritet, which may account for the increase of his business since he first settled in the quarter with his last thousand-franc note and Dutocq's introduction. Cadenet, prompted by avarice enhanced by prosperity, had, since the beginning of the year, offered his friend Céritet the use of twenty thousand francs; but Céritet had refused the loan, saying that the risks he ran were of a character to cause differences between partners.

'I could only give you six per cent,' said he; 'and you can do better than that in your own line. We will form a partnership by and by for some serious undertaking; but a really good opening would cost us at least fifty thousand francs; and when you have as much as that—well, we will talk about it.'

Céritet had given Théodore the chance of the job over the house, after clearly perceiving that they three—Madame Poiret, Cadenet, and himself—could never find a hundred thousand francs.

The petty usurer was perfectly safe in this den, where at need he could have strong assistance. On some mornings there would be not less than from sixty to eighty persons, men and women, either in the wine-shop, or lounging in the entry, or sitting on the steps, or in the office, to which the cautious money-lender never admitted more than six persons at once. The first comers were the first served, and as each one was only admitted in his

turn, the tavern-keeper or his man chalked the numbers on the men's hats and on the women's backs.

Then there was a sale and exchange of early for back numbers, as among cabmen on a stand. On certain days, when market business was pressing, a first number was worth a glass of brandy and a sou. Those who came out called the next numbers to be admitted, and if any squabbles arose, Cadenet had them to rights by observing :—

'If you bring up the watch and the police, what good would that do you? He would have to shut up shop.'

*He* was Cérizet. When, in the course of the day, a wretched woman in despair, with no bread in the house and children faint with hunger, came to borrow ten or twenty sous : 'Is he in?' she would ask the wine-seller or his assistant.

Cadenet, a short, fat man dressed in blue, with deep, black linen cuffs and an apron, and a cap on his head, was as an angel of mercy to these poor mothers when he replied :—

'He told me you were an honest soul, and I might give you forty sous. You know what you have to do—' And, strange to say, *he* was blest, as Popinot had been before him.

On Sunday morning, when accounts were made up, Cérizet was abused ; still more was he cursed on Saturday, when borrowers had to work hard to find the sum lent and the interest on it. Still, he was Providence, he was God, from Tuesday to Friday every week.

The room he sat in, formerly the kitchen of the first floor rooms, was bare ; the beams overhead, now white-washed, showed traces of smoke. The walls, along which he had placed wooden benches, and the stone quarries of the floor, alternately absorbed and exhaled the damp. The hood of the chimney had not been removed ; but instead of a hearth, there was an iron stove in which Cérizet burnt sea-coal when the weather was cold. Under the high

chimney opening, the hearth was covered with boards about six inches higher than the floor and six feet square, on which stood a table worth perhaps a franc, and a wooden chair with a circular cushion covered with green leather. The wall behind him Cérizet had faced with match-boarding ; he was also shut in by a screen of unpainted deal on each side to shelter him from the draught from the window and door ; but this screen did not intercept the warmth from the stove. The inside shutters of the window were enormously thick and lined with sheet-iron, with a bar to fasten them, and the door commanded respect by the same plate armour.

In the further corner of the room was a spiral stair, out of some shop that had been pulled down, purchased second hand in the Rue Chapon by Cadenet, who had had it fitted to the floor of the room above. To cut off all communication between the room on the entresol and the first floor, Cérizet had insisted on having the door of his upper room bricked up. Thus the residence was a citadel. The man's bedroom furniture consisted of a carpet bought for twenty francs, a school-boy's bed, a chest of drawers, two chairs, and an arm-chair, with an iron chest looking like a desk — the work of a capital maker, and bought second hand. He shaved in front of the glass over the chimney. He possessed two pairs of cotton sheets, six calico shirts, and the rest to match. Once or twice Cadenet had seen Cérizet dressed as a man of fashion ; so it was evident that he kept hidden away in the bottom drawer a complete outfit, in which he could go to the opera or even into society without being identified ; for on these occasions Cadenet himself, but for the sound of his lodger's voice, would have asked him : 'What would you please to want ?'

What most charmed his 'customers' was his geniality, his power of repartee ; he spoke their language. Cadenet, his two shopmen, and Cérizet lived surrounded by the

utmost misery, but preserved the indifference of a mute among the heirs of the deceased, of old sergeants of the Guard amid the killed ; they no more groaned when they listened to cries of hunger or despair than surgeons groan on hearing their patients in the hospital ; like soldiers and sick nurses, they were always ready with the trivial advice : ‘ Have patience ; a little spirit. What is the use of breaking your heart over it ? If you kill yourself, what then ? You can grow used to anything ; a little common sense.’

Though Cérizet always took the precaution of hiding the cash necessary for his mornings’ transactions in the seat of the chair he sat on, of taking out no more than a hundred francs at a time, which he kept in his trousers pockets, and of never going to the reserve but between two batches of customers, behind locked doors, which he did not open till he had pocketed the coin he took out ; he really had nothing to fear from the despairing souls who came from all parts to this fountain-head of money. There are, no doubt, many ways of being honest or virtuous, and the *Monograph on Virtue*\* is exclusively based on this social axiom. A man first sins against his conscience ; then he conspicuously sins against that delicate bloom of honour, the loss of which does not mean general disrepute ; finally he fails distinctly in honesty ; but though he falls into the hands of the police, he still is not yet amenable to the assizes ; and even after the disgrace of being condemned by a jury, he may be respected on the hulks if he maintains the sort of honour that exists among villains, and which consists in telling no tales, in always playing fair, in sharing every risk.

Well, this last rag of honesty, which is perhaps self-interest and necessity, while the practice of it leaves a man some chance of magnanimity and some return to better

\* *Monographie de la Vertu* : a work in the same vein as the *Physiologie du Mariage*, at which the author has been working since 1833, the date when it was first announced. — *Author's note.*

ways, existed in perfection between Cérizet and his clients. Cérizet never made a mistake, nor did his poor debtors; they told each other no lies, neither as to capital nor interest. On many occasions, Cérizet, who was, after all, a man of the people, had rectified one week the involuntary mistake of a previous reckoning to the advantage of the wretched creatures who had not discovered it. So he was regarded as a dog, but an honest dog; in the midst of that city of woes his word was sacred.

A woman died, thirty francs in his debt.

'These are my profits!' exclaimed he to his customers; 'and you howl at me! But I shall not torment the brats. And Cadenet has taken them bread and thin wine.'

After this—a very skilful stroke of business—his neighbours would say:—

'He is not a bad sort of man.'

Short loans at high interest, as practised by Cérizet, is not, take it all round, so cruel a system as that of the Mont-de-Piété. Cérizet lent ten francs on Tuesday on condition of getting twelve back on the following Sunday. In five weeks he had doubled his capital; but compositions were frequent. His good nature was shown from time to time in accepting only eleven francs, fifty centimes: the rest stood over. When he lent fifty francs for sixty to a small green-grocer, or a hundred for a hundred and twenty to a peat-seller, he ran some risk.

Théodore and Dutocq, coming down the Rue des Postes to the Rue des Poules, saw a mob of men and women, and by the light from the lamps in the wine-shop they were alarmed at perceiving this mass of red faces, seamed and distorted and dejected by misery, withered or bloated or bald, thickened by wine, emaciated by fiery spirits, some threatening and some resigned, some jeering, some sarcastic, others stupefied, and all clad in the ignominious rags which no caricaturist can exaggerate, even in his most extravagant moods.

'Some one will recognise me,' said la Peyrade, dragging Dutocq away. 'We are fools to have come to find him in the midst of his business.'

'Especially as we never thought that Claparon might be sleeping in his den, which is unknown to us as far as the interior is concerned. Look here; though there are difficulties in your way, there are none in mine. I may have something to say to my copying clerk, and I will go and tell him to come to dinner, for the Courts sit to-day, and we shall not have time for breakfast. We will fix to meet at the *Chaumière*, in one of the arbours in the garden.'

'That is no good; we may be overheard without knowing it. I prefer the *Petit Rocher de Cancale*; we can take a box and talk low.'

'And if you are seen with Céritet?'

'Well, then, let us go to the *Cheval Rouge*, on the Quai de Tournelle.'

'That is better; at seven o'clock there will be no one there.'

So Dutocq made his way alone among this congress of beggars, and he heard his name on all sides; for he could not fail to be recognised by some one who had been in the dock, just as Théodore would have been by some clients.

In such a neighbourhood the Justice of the peace (equivalent to the County Court Magistrate in London) is the supreme legal authority; every case ends in his court, especially now that the law makes his decisions final in every case where the sum in dispute is not more than a hundred and forty francs. So the Justice's clerk was allowed to pass—a person of no less worship than the judge himself. On the steps women were sitting, a horrible display, like flowers arranged in stages; and among them were some young, some pale and suffering. The variety of colours in handkerchiefs, caps, gowns, and aprons made

the comparison more exact, perhaps, than any comparison ought to be.

When Dutocq opened the door of the room where sixty people had already been interviewed, he was almost asphyxiated.

‘Your number? What is your number?’ shouted a chorus of voices.

‘Hold your jaw!’ cried a hoarse voice from the street.  
‘He is the Justice’s quill-driver.’

Utter silence ensued.

Dutocq found his copying clerk dressed in a buff leather waistcoat, like the gloves worn by the gendarmes, and over it a squalid vest of knitted worsted. The unwholesome physiognomy may be imagined above this ungainly garb, crowned by a shabby bandanna wound about his head so as to show the forehead and hairless nape, and giving the features a look as repulsive as it was sinister, especially by the light of a dip, twelve to the pound.

‘It cannot be done on those terms, Daddy Lantimêche,’ Cérezet was saying to a tall old man, who looked at least seventy, and who stood before him, his red worsted cap in his hand, showing a bald head, while a chest covered with white hairs was visible under his shabby blouse. ‘Explain to me what you want it for. A hundred francs, even with a hundred and twenty to come in, cannot be turned loose like a dog in a church.’

The other five clients present, among whom were two nursing mothers, one knitting, the other suckling her baby, — shouted with laughter.

Cérezet, when he saw Dutocq, rose respectfully to meet him, as he added: —

‘You can have time to think about it; for you see I am not satisfied to find an old smith’s labourer wanting so much as a hundred francs.’

‘But it is to start an invention!’ cried the old workman.

‘An invention — and a hundred francs! You do not

know what the law is; you will want two thousand,' said Dutocq. 'You must take out a patent; you must find patrons.'

'It is quite true,' said Céritet, who often relied on chances of this kind. 'Here, Daddy Lantimêche, come again to-morrow morning at six o'clock and we will talk about it. We cannot discuss an invention before other people.'

Céritet listened to Dutocq, whose first words were:—

'If it is any good, we will go halves.'

'Why on earth did you get up so early to tell me that?' said the suspicious money-lender, much annoyed at this notion of 'halves.' 'You would have seen me at the office.'

He looked askance at Dutocq, who, while telling him the truth, and speaking of Claparon and the necessity for taking up la Peyrade's business as promptly as possible, seemed to obscure matters.

'Well, you could have seen me at the office in the course of the morning,' he repeated, as he saw Dutocq to the door.

'There is a fellow,' said he to himself, as he returned to his seat, 'who seems to me to have blown out the lantern for fear I should see too much. Well, I can give up my place as copying clerk.—What! you, mother,' he went on aloud; 'you invent children, don't you? It is a funny game, though rather played out.'

It is needless to report the interview between these three schemers; all the more so because the decisions they arrived at were the basis of la Peyrade's confidences afterwards to Mademoiselle Thuillier; but it may be said that the Provençal's craftiness almost dismayed Céritet and Dutocq. When the conference was over, the idea had dawned in the petty usurer's mind of throwing up his hand in the game, as he found himself pledged to partnership with such strong players. To win at any cost and

beat the sharpest, even by cheating if need be, is an inspiration of vanity peculiar to the votaries of the green cloth. This led to the terrible blow which la Peyrade was fated to receive.

However, he knew his two associates ; and notwithstanding the perpetual turmoil of intellectual effort in which he lived, and the incessant watchfulness needed to keep up his manifold impersonations, nothing fatigued him more than the part he had to play with these two accomplices. Dutocq was a thorough scoundrel, and Céribet had been on the stage ; they could see through any mask. An immovable face à la Talleyrand would have led them to throw over the Provençal who was now in their power, and he was forced to affect ease and confidence, and play above board — which is no doubt the highest achievement of art. To deceive the pit is an every-day success, but to take in Mademoiselle Mars, Frédéric Lemaître, Potier, Talma, Monrose, is the triumph of acting.

The result of this interview was to produce in Théodore, who was as sagacious as Céribet, a secret fear which, towards the end of this closely fought game, fevered his blood and stirred his pulses to the pitch of putting him into the morbid state of a player with his eye on the roulette board when he has risked his last stake. His senses acquire a lucidity, his intelligence attains a breadth of purview for which human knowledge has no measure.

On the day after this meeting, la Peyrade dined with the Thuilliers ; and Thuillier, under the obvious pretext of having to pay a call on Madame de Saint-Foudrille, — the wife of a man of science with whom he was anxious to become intimate, — went off after dinner with his wife, leaving Théodore with Brigitte. Neither Thuillier, nor his sister, nor Théodore, was the dupe of this manœuvre, and the old buck of the Empire dignified the farce by the name of diplomacy.

“ Young man, do not take advantage of my sister’s guile-

lessness, but respect it,' said Thuillier, solemnly, before going out.

'Has it occurred to you, Mademoiselle,' said Théodore, drawing his chair closer to Brigitte as she sat knitting, 'to secure the interest of the commercial class of the district for Thuillier?'

'How?' said she.

'Well, you have business connections with Barbet and Métivier.'

'To be sure, you are right. By jingo! but you are no fool,' she added after a pause.

'We are always ready to serve those we love,' he replied with sententious reserve.

To get the better of Brigitte in the long struggle begun two years ago, would be to hold the key of the position, like carrying the redoubt at the Moskowa. But the only way was to get the mastery of her mind, as, in the middle ages, people were believed to be possessed of the Devil, and so effectually that no undceiving should ever be possible. For three days past, la Peyrade had been taking measure of the undertaking, and had walked all round it, as it were, to reconnoitre the position. Flattery, the infallible weapon in skilled hands, could have no effect on an old maid who had long known that she had no beauty. But to a determined man no place is impregnable—a Lamarque can always seize Caprea. So no detail must be omitted of the eventful scene of that evening; every point had its value—pauses, downcast looks, glances, tones of voice.

'You have already proved your affection for us,' said Brigitte.

'Your brother has told you?'

'No; he only said that you wished to speak to me.'

'Yes, Mademoiselle, for you are the man of the family. But, on thinking matters over, I perceived no little danger for myself in this affair, and a man does not compromise

himself unless for those near and dear to him. There is a perfect fortune in the scales — thirty to forty thousand francs a year — and not in the least speculative. A free-hold. The necessity for providing Thuillier with a fortune bewitched me from the first. It was fascinating and, as I told him, — for, short of being an idiot, a man asks himself: “Why on earth should he be so eager to help me?” — well, as I told him, by working for his advantage, I flattered myself I might be working for my own.

‘Now, if he wishes to be a member of the Chamber, two things are requisite: he must pay the taxes on a sufficient qualification, and get his name known by some sort of celebrity. If I can carry devotion so far as to be ready to help him to write a book on Public Credit, — or on no matter what, — I might certainly also think of his fortune, and it would be absurd in you to give him this house — ’

‘To my brother? Why, I would place it in his name to-morrow,’ cried Brigitte; ‘you do not know me.’

‘I do not altogether know you,’ said Théodore; ‘but I know things of you which have made me regret that I did not tell you everything from the first moment when I formed the plan to which Thuillier will owe his election. He will be the object of envy at once, and he will certainly have an uphill task; we must annihilate his rivals, deprive them of every pretext.’

‘But this business,’ said Brigitte; ‘what are the obstacles?’

‘Mademoiselle, they exist in my conscience, and I cannot serve you in the matter till I have consulted my confessor. As far as the world is concerned, oh! the transaction is perfectly legal, I am incapable — I, as you understand, a duly registered advocate, and the member of a somewhat rigid association — am incapable, I say, of suggesting an arrangement which could give rise to a scandal. My first excuse is, that I will not take a farthing.’

Brigitte was on hot irons; her face was flushed, she broke

her wool, and knotted it together, and did not know how to contain herself.

'A freehold worth forty thousand a year,' said she, 'is not to be bought nowadays for less than one million eight hundred thousand francs.'

'Well, I promise you that you shall see the property, and calculate the probable returns, and that I will secure it to Thuillier for fifty thousand.'

'Well, if you will enable us to get that,' cried Brigitte, worked up to the highest point of excitement by the tempest of her avarice, 'go, my dear Monsieur Théodore —'

She stopped short.

'Well, Mademoiselle ?'

'You *will*, perhaps, have worked for your own advantage.'

'Oh, if Thuillier has told you my secret, I leave your house.'

Brigitte looked up.

'Did he tell you that I love Céleste ?'

'No, on my word of honour !' cried Brigitte. 'But I was going to speak of her.'

'To offer her to me ? Nay, God forgive me, but I would not wish to owe her to any one but herself, her parents, her own free choice. No, all I ask of you is your good-will, your favour. Promise me, as Thuillier has promised, as the reward of my services, your influence, your friendship ; tell me that you will regard me as a son — and then I will take your advice. I will decide in obedience to your views without consulting my confessor. Why, for two years, during which I have studied the family with which I would gladly ally my name and which I should be happy to enrich by my energy — for I am bound to get on — I have not failed to discover that you have an old-world honesty, a spirit of inflexible rectitude, and knowledge of business — and those are the qualities a man likes to have about him. With such a mother-in-law as you, I should

find domestic life swept clear of a thousand money details which hamper a man's political advancement, when he has to think of them. How I admired you on Sunday evening! You were magnificent! How you made things fly! In ten minutes, I believe, the drawing-room was cleared; and without stirring out of the house you had everything at hand for refreshments and supper. "There," said I to myself, "That is a capable woman!"

Brigitte's nostrils dilated, she inhaled the young lawyer's adulation, and he gave her a side glance, enjoying her triumph. He had touched a responsive chord.

"Oh," said she, "I am accustomed to housekeeping — it answers to my hand."

"Yes," said Théodore, "if I can consult a clear and pure conscience I shall be satisfied."

He had risen, but he now sat down again and said: —

"This is how the business stands, my dear aunt; for you will be a sort of aunt."

"Hold your tongue, dear boy," said Brigitte, "and tell me the facts."

"I will tell you exactly, and observe that I am risking my reputation by divulging them; for I owe my knowledge of such secrets to my position as a lawyer, so we are committing between us a sort of legal high treason. A Paris notary and an architect entered into partnership to buy some building land and built upon it; at this moment they have collapsed; there was some error in their calculations, but we need not trouble ourselves about all that. Among the houses erected by this illicit firm — for notaries are not supposed to go into business partnerships — there is one which, being unfinished, is so under value that it is offered for sale for no more than a hundred thousand francs, though the ground and structure cost four hundred thousand. As nothing remains to be finished but the interior fittings, — and nothing can be easier to estimate; as, moreover, those fittings are all ready at the builder's, and he will sell them

cheap,—the sum to be spent will not exceed fifty thousand francs. Now the house, being in a good position, it will let for forty thousand francs a year, taxes paid. It is built entirely of squared stone, and the party walls of stone rubble; the front is decorated with handsome sculpture that cost more than twenty thousand francs; the windows are of plate-glass, with a new kind of bolt called *Crémone*.'

'Where is the difficulty?'

'Ah! that is the point. The notary has reserved this plum of the cake he has to surrender, and under the name of his friends he is one of the creditors who demand the sale of the property under the assignees' order. There was no action at law, that is too costly; the sale is under a voluntary declaration. Well, the notary happened to apply to a client of mine for the use of his name as the purchaser; my client is a poor devil, and he came to me and said: "There is a fortune in the thing if you can get rid of the notary."'

'It is often done in trade,' said Brigitte eagerly.

'If this were the only difficulty,' replied Théodore, 'it would be plain sailing; as a friend of mine said to one of his pupils, who was lamenting the immense difficulties in the way of producing a masterpiece of art: "My dear boy, if it were not so the footman would do it!"' But, Mademoiselle, even if we caught this dreadful notary who, you may take my word for it, richly deserves it, for he has taken toll of many a private fortune — as he is very sharp, though he is a notary, it will probably be very hard to trip him up twice. When you purchase real estate, if the mortgagees think they are likely to be losers by the low price, they have the right within a certain limit of time to put up the price, that is to say, to offer a larger sum and keep the property. If the first bidder cannot play this fish till the time has elapsed for his raising the price, another kind of trick must be tried. But are such dealings legal? Dare a man undertake them for the benefit of the family?

he hopes to belong to? For three days I have been asking myself these questions.'

Brigitte, it must be confessed, hesitated, and Théodore then put forward his last suggestion.

'Take the night to think of it; to-morrow we will talk it over.'

'Listen, my boy,' said Brigitte, looking at the lawyer almost amorously, 'in the first place I must see the house. Where is it?'

'Not far from the Madeleine; in ten years it will be the heart of Paris! And if you did but know it, that land has been rising in value ever since 1819. Du Tillet the banker's fortune was made there. The famous bankruptcy of Roguin the notary, which spread terror in Paris and was such a blow to the reputation of his cloth,—the bankruptcy which ruined Birotteau the famous perfumer,—was caused by that alone. They had speculated a little too wildly in that land.'

'I remember,' said Brigitte.

'The house could certainly be finished by the end of this year, and tenants could come in by the middle of next year.'

'Can we go there to-morrow?'

'Aunt, I am at your orders.'

'Mercy! never call me aunt before other people. As to business, I cannot decide till I have seen the house.'

'It is six storeys high, has nine windows across the front, a spacious court-yard, and four shops, and it stands at a corner. Oh, the notary knew what he was about, never fear! But if some political change occurs the funds and investments generally will go down. In your place I would sell all Madame Thuillier holds, and all you hold in the State funds, to buy this fine property for Thuillier, and I would reinstate that poor bigot's fortune out of future savings. Can consols go higher than they are now—a hundred and twenty-two? It is fabulous; you must make haste.'

Brigitte's mouth watered ; she saw a way to save her own capital and to enrich her brother at Madame Thuillier's expense.

'My brother is right,' said she to Théodore ; 'you are a very remarkable man and will go far.'

'And he will walk before me,' said la Peyrade in an artless way which captivated the old maid.

'You will be one of the family,' said she.

'There will be obstacles !' said Théodore. 'Madame Thuillier is a little crazy and she does not like me.'

'I would like to see her interfere,' cried Brigitte. 'Let us do the job if it is feasible,' she added, 'and leave your interests in my hands.'

'Thuillier, a member of the Municipal Council, possessed of a house that will let for at least forty thousand francs, a member of the Legion of Honour, and the author of a solid, serious book, will be returned as deputy at one of the coming elections. But, between you and me, my little aunt, a man only devotes himself so entirely to his real father-in-law.'

'You are right.'

'Though I have no fortune, I shall have doubled yours ; and if this affair is not talked about, I will try to find others.'

'Until I have seen the house,' said Mademoiselle Thuillier, 'I can come to no decision.'

'Well, then, take a hackney coach to-morrow and we will go ; I will get a ticket to view the premises to-morrow morning.'

'Till to-morrow then at about twelve,' replied Brigitte, holding out her hand to Théodore ; but instead of merely taking it he pressed a kiss on it, at once more tender and more respectful than Brigitte had ever received.

'Good-bye, my dear boy,' said she as he went out at the door.

She hastily rang the bell, and when one of the maids appeared :—

‘Joséphine,’ said she, ‘go at once to Madame Colleville, and ask her to come to see me.’

A quarter of an hour later, Flavie came into the room, where Brigitte was pacing to and fro in alarming excitement.

‘My dear, I want you to do me a great service in a matter that concerns our little Céleste. You know Tullia, the opera-dancer; time was when my brother dinned her into my ears.’

‘Yes, my dear, but she is no longer an opera-dancer. She is Madame la Comtesse du Bruel. Is not her husband a peer of France?’

‘Are you still friends?’

‘We never see each other.’

‘Well, but I happen to know that Chaffaroux, the rich builder, is her uncle,’ said the old maid. ‘He is old, he is wealthy; go to see your old ally and get her to write a few lines to her uncle, telling him that he will be doing her the greatest personal service by giving his advice on a matter about which you wish to consult him, and we will call at his house to-morrow at about one o’clock. But she must enjoin on the uncle the most profound secrecy.’

‘Go, my dear girl. Our darling Céleste shall be a millionaire, and I will find her a husband, mark my words, who will place her on a pinnacle.’

‘Shall I tell you the first letters of his name?’

‘Well, speak.’

‘Théodore de la Peyrade! You are in the right. He is a man who, with the help of such a woman as you, may rise to be a minister.’

‘God himself sent him to this house,’ cried the old maid.

At this moment Monsieur and Madame Thuillier came home.

Five days later, in the month of April, the writ, calling on the electors to appoint, on the thirtieth of that month,

a member of the Municipal Council, was inserted in the *Moniteur*, and placarded about Paris. The Ministry, known as the Administration of the First of March, had held office for some weeks.

Brigitte was in high good humour; she had verified la Peyrade's statements. The house, thoroughly inspected by old Chaffaroux from cellar to garret, was pronounced by him to be admirably well built; poor Grindot, the architect involved in the business with Claparon and the notary, believed that he was working for the owner; Madame du Bruel's uncle supposed that his niece's interests were at stake, and he said that he would finish the house for thirty thousand francs. So, for the past week, Théodore had been Brigitte's idol; she argued with the most artless dishonesty to prove to him that fortune must be snatched at when it offers.

'And if there is any sin in this business,' said she, as they stood in the middle of the garden, 'you will tell it in confession.'

'The deuce is in it,' cried Thuillier; 'a man's first duty is to his relations.'

'I will do it,' said la Peyrade in a broken voice, 'but on certain conditions. I will not be taxed with greed and avarice in marrying Céleste. If you load me with remorse, at any rate let me maintain my character in the eyes of the world. Only settle on Céleste — you, my dear old boy, Thuillier — the reversion of the house I am about to secure for you.'

'That is wise.'

'Do not rob yourselves,' Théodore went on; 'and my dear little aunt must agree to this when the settlements are made. Place all the rest of the capital at your command in the funds, in Madame Thuillier's name, and let her do what she likes with it. We shall then all live together, and I will undertake to make my own fortune as soon as I am relieved of anxiety as to my future maintenance.'

‘Done with you !’ exclaimed Thuillier; ‘that is the speech of an honest man.’

‘Let me kiss your forehead, my boy,’ cried the old maid. ‘Still, as a girl must have some money, we will give Céleste sixty thousand francs.’

‘For her pin-money,’ said la Peyrade.

‘We are all three people of honour,’ cried Thuillier. ‘It is a settled thing; you will secure us the house, we will write my political book together, and you will move the earth to get me the Legion of Honour.’

‘Oh ! You will have it as surely as you will be elected Town Councillor by the first of May. Only, my good friend, and you, too, my little aunt, be secret, and pay no heed to the calumnies that will be hurled at me when the men I must deceive turn against me. I shall be a vagabond, a swindler, a dangerous man, a Jesuit, an intriguer, a fortune-hunter.—Can you listen unmoved to all this ?’

‘Be easy,’ said Brigitte.

From that day forth Thuillier was ‘my dear fellow’; this was the name by which Théodore always addressed him, with shades of tone and an expression of affection which surprised Flavie. But ‘little aunt,’ the words that so delighted Brigitte, were spoken only before the Thuilliers, or in a whisper if anybody were present, or, now and then, before Flavie.

The activity displayed by Théodore, Dutocq, and Céritet, by Barbet, Métivier, the Minards, the Phellions, the Laudigeois, by Colleville, Pron, Barniol, and their friends, was prodigious. Great and small set their hands to the task. Cadenet secured thirty votes in his division, and wrote the names of seven electors who could only set their cross.

On the thirtieth of April, Thuillier was duly elected a member of the Municipal Council for the Department of the Seine, by an imposing majority, for only sixty votes kept his election from being unanimous. On the first of

May Thuillier joined that municipal body in going to the Tuileries to congratulate the king on his *fête* day, and he came home beaming ; he had followed close on Minard's heels.

A yellow poster, ten days later, announced the sale of the house by voluntary act of the owners, the reserved price being seventy-five thousand francs ; the sale to be concluded at the end of July. On this point there was an agreement — verbal, of course — between Claparon and Céribet, by which Céribet promised Claparon a bonus of fifteen thousand francs if he only succeeded in putting off the notary till beyond the time allowed for a higher bid. Mademoiselle Thuillier, informed of this by Théodore, gave full consent to this secret clause, understanding that she would have to pay the abettors of this amiable treachery. The money was to be paid through the virtuous advocate.

Claparon held a meeting at midnight, in the Place de l'Observatoire, with his other accomplice, the notary, whose office and connection, though put up for sale by a decision delivered in the court for regulating the business of Paris notaries, was not yet sold.

This young man, the successor of Leopold Hannequin, had tried to run to fortune instead of walking ; he still saw another future before him and was trying to work everything at once. In this interview he had bid as high as ten thousand francs to purchase safety in this dirty job ; he was not to pay the sum over to Claparon till after the attesting of a declaration signed by the purchaser. The notary knew that this sum was the only capital at Claparon's disposal to help him to remake his fortune, and he thought himself sure of him.

'Who else in all Paris would give me such a commission for the job ?' said Claparon, with an assumption of guilelessness. 'You may sleep soundly of nights ; I will get the very man to be our stalking-horse as purchaser, one of your honest men who are too stupid to have ideas like

yours. He is an old retired clerk; you have only to give him the money to pay and he will sign the papers.'

When the notary had made it clear to Claparon that all he could get out of him was ten thousand francs, Cérizet offered his old partner twelve thousand and proceeded to demand fifteen of Théodore, not meaning, of course, to give more than twelve to Claparon. All the scenes between these four men were garnished with fine words about sentiment and honour, about what men owed to each other when they were fated to work together, and to meet again in the course of events. While these submarine transactions were carried out for Thuillier's benefit, Théodore reporting them to him with expressions of utter disgust at having to soil his fingers with such dirty work, these two laid their heads together over the great work which the 'dear fellow' was to publish; and the member of the Municipal Council came to the conclusion that he could never achieve anything without this man of genius, whose talents amazed him and whose readiness constantly astonished him, so that every day made it seem more necessary that he should make la Peyrade his son-in-law. After the month of May Théodore dined with the 'dear fellow' four days out of every seven.

At this time indeed Théodore was undisputed monarch of the family, and was approved by all their friends. This was the way of it. The Phellions, hearing Thuillier and Brigitte singing la Peyrade's praises, feared to offend these two potentates and joined in the chorus, even though this perpetual laudation might annoy them or seem exaggerated. It was the same with the Minards. And, indeed, la Peyrade's behaviour as the friend of the family was always admirable; he disarmed hostility by effacing himself; he was no more than an additional piece of furniture; he led the Phellions and the Minards to believe that Brigitte and Thuillier had summed him up, weighed him, and found him

too light ever to be anything more than the good young man to whom they might be of use.

'Perhaps he thinks,' said Thuillier to Minard one day, 'that my sister will feather his nest for him in her will. He little knows her.'

This speech, prompted by Théodore, soothed Minard's suspicious curiosity.

'He is devoted to us,' said the old maid to Phellion one day, 'but he owes us a debt of gratitude; we let him off his rent and he almost lives with us.'

This contemptuous tone, again inspired by Théodore and echoed from one to another of all the families that haunted Thuillier's drawing-room, dispelled every fear, and Théodore gave effect to the remarks thus uttered by Thuillier and his sister by all the servility of a hanger-on. At whist he screened the 'dear fellow's' blunders; his smile, as rigid and benign as Madame Thuillier's, was ready to encourage the homely jests of the brother and the sister alike.

He thus secured what he most ardently aimed at, the contempt of his real enemies, and wrapped himself in it as in a mantle to hide his power. For four months he preserved the stupid attitude of a snake swallowing and digesting its prey. And he would go into the garden with Colleville or Flavie to lay aside his mask and laugh, and rest and refresh himself by abandoning himself to nervous outbursts of passion which terrified or touched his future mother-in-law.

'Have you no pity for me?' he said to her the day before the signing of the preliminary contract of sale, by which Thuillier became provisionally the owner of the house for twenty-five thousand francs. 'Such a man as I! sneaking round like a cat, suppressing every retort, swallowing down my gall! And repelled by you!'

'My friend, my child!' said Flavie, who was still undecided.

These words may serve as a thermometer to show at

what temperature this clever actor maintained his intrigue with Flavie. The poor woman wavered between her heart and morality, between religion and the mystery of passion.

Meanwhile Félix Phellion gave young Colleville lessons with praiseworthy regularity and devotion; he bestowed endless hours on him, believing that he was working for the family that would be his. In gratitude for his kindness, and under la Peyrade's advice, the professor was invited to dine on Thursdays with the Collevilles, and Théodore never failed to be there. Flavie would make a purse, or work slippers or a cigar case for the happy youth, who would exclaim:—

‘I am more than paid, Madame, by the happiness of being of use to you.’

‘We are not rich, Monsieur,’ Colleville would reply, ‘but, hang it all, we are not ungrateful.’

Old Phellion rubbed his hands as he listened to his son on his return from these dinners — he would see his dear, his noble Félix married to Céleste.

Still, the more she loved him the more serious and reserved was Céleste in her demeanour to Félix; all the more since her mother had spoken to her very decidedly one evening, and ended by saying:—

‘Give young Phellion no encouragement, my child. Neither your father nor I can settle whom you are to marry; hopes are founded on your future prospects, and it is far more important to secure the affection of Mademoiselle Brigitte and your godfather than to win the good graces of a penniless professor. If you do not wish to kill your mother, my darling — yes, to kill me, — obey me blindly in this matter, and get it firmly into your head that above all else we aim at seeing you happy.’

As the sale of the property was definitely fixed for the end of July, towards the end of June Théodore advised Brigitte to be prepared with the money; and on the eve

of the sale, she sold all her own and her sister-in-law's securities in the public funds. The disastrous alliance of the four powers, an insult to France, is a matter of history ; but it is necessary to recall the fact that from July till the end of August French stocks, scared by the prospect of war to which Monsieur Thiers lent himself rather too readily, fell twenty francs ; three per cents stood at sixty. Nor was this all ; this financial rout reacted disastrously on real estate in Paris ; land that happened to be in the market was sold for a mere song. These circumstances made Théodore figure as a prophet, as a man of genius in the eyes of Brigitte and Thuillier, to whom the house was assigned at the price of seventy-five thousand francs.

The notary, involved in this political catastrophe, his office being sold, found himself obliged to go into the country for some days ; but he took with him Claparon's thousand francs. Thuillier, by la Peyrade's advice, made a contract with Grindot, who believed he was finishing the house for the notary ; and as, during this period of financial disturbance, works were to a great extent suspended, and workmen left standing with folded arms, the architect was enabled to finish the house, which he particularly fancied, in a really splendid style.

He decorated four drawing-rooms richly gilt for twenty-five thousand francs. Théodore insisted that the bargain should be in writing, and that fifty thousand francs should be put down instead of twenty-five.

This purchase magnified Thuillier's importance tenfold. As to the notary, he had quite lost his head in the presence of political events which had fallen like a waterspout on a fine day. Théodore, secure of his influence, relying on his many services, and having a hold over Thuillier so long as they were working together, was admired by Brigitte especially for his decent reticence — for he never made the smallest allusion to his poverty, and never talked about

money, and he assumed a rather less slavish manner than he had hitherto shown. Thuillier and Brigitte would say to him :—

‘ Nothing can rob you of our esteem ; you are at home under our roof. The opinion of Minard and Phellion, of whom you seem so much afraid, is not worth a verse by Victor Hugo to us. Let them talk ; hold up your head ! ’

‘ We still need their help for Thuillier’s election to parliament,’ said Théodore. ‘ Follow my advice. You find it answers, do not you ? When the house is really yours, you will have got it practically for nothing ; for you can buy three per cents at sixty in Madame Thuillier’s name so as to restore her whole fortune. You have only to wait till the period allowed by law for a higher bid has elapsed, and to have the fifteen thousand francs in readiness for our rascals.’

Brigitte wasted no time ; she realised all her own capital excepting a sum of one hundred and twenty thousand francs, and then taking discount off her sister-in-law’s fortune, she reinvested two hundred and forty thousand francs in the three per cents in Madame Thuillier’s name, bringing her in twelve thousand francs a year ; she also purchased enough to give herself ten thousand francs a year, determining never to worry herself over discounting bills again. She saw her brother with forty thousand francs a year besides his pension ; Madame Thuillier with her twelve thousand, while she herself had eighteen thousand,—sixty thousand francs in all, and rent free, which she estimated at eight thousand.

‘ We are a match for the Minards now ! ’ cried she.

‘ We will not sing victory, just yet,’ said Théodore. There is yet a week to run before the time is out for raising the bid. I have been attending to your affairs, and my own are in a terrible mess.’

‘ But, my dear boy, you have friends ! ’ exclaimed Brigitte,

'and if you want twenty-five louis you can always find them here.'

At this speech Théodore and Thuillier smiled at each other.

Thuillier took him into the garden and said: —

'My poor sister must be excused; she sees the world through the mouth of a bottle. But if you want twenty-five thousand francs I will lend them to you — out of my first rents,' he added.

'Thuillier, I have a rope round my neck,' exclaimed Théodore. 'Since I became an advocate I have had to sign bills. But mum's the word!' he added, frightened at having betrayed the secret of his position. 'I am in the clutches of scoundrels — I should like to turn the tables!'

Théodore had a twofold motive in telling his secret. First to sound Thuillier, and secondly to forefend a terrible blow which might be dealt him in the course of the covert and desperate struggle he had long foreseen. His terrible situation may be explained in a few words.

In the abject poverty he had lived through no one but Cérizet had ever come to see him in the garret where, in the bitterest weather, he was lying in bed for lack of clothes. He had but one shirt belonging to him. For three days he had lived on one loaf, cutting it carefully into portions, and he was wondering: 'What is to be done?' when his old ally made his appearance, just released from prison and pardoned.

As to the various schemes plotted by these two men before a fire of faggots, one wrapped in his landlady's counterpane, the other in his infamy, it is useless to record them here. On the following day, Cérizet, who had come across Dutocq in the course of the morning, brought la Peyrade trousers, waistcoat, and coat, a hat and boots bought at an old-clothes stall in the Temple, and then carried him off to give him a dinner. The Provençal ate at Pinson's eating-house in the Rue de l'Ancienne-Comédie, quite half

of a dinner that cost forty-seven francs. At dessert, between two glasses of wine, Céritet said to his friend : —

‘ Will you sign fifty thousand francs worth of bills for me, calling yourself an advocate ? ’

‘ You wont get five thousand for them,’ replied Théodore.

‘ That is no affair of yours, you will pay the whole sum. That will be our share — my friend’s and mine — of a business in which you will risk nothing, but in which you will gain the title of advocate, a good connection, and the hand of a little girl no older than an old dog, and owning at least twenty to thirty thousand francs a year. Neither Dutocq nor I can marry her ; we must rig you out, make you look like a respectable man, feed you, lodge you, give you decent furniture. So we must have some guarantee. I do not speak for myself, but for my friend here, who will use my name. We will fit you out as a corsair to run after the yellow boys, you see ! If we do not capture this little fortune we will try some other game. Between ourselves we certainly need not keep our gloves on to save our fingers.

‘ We will give you your instructions, for the affair must not be hurried ; there will be a hard tug, I can tell you ! Here, I have some stamps.’

‘ Waiter, a pen and ink ! ’ said Théodore.

‘ That’s the sort of man I like,’ said Dutocq.

‘ Sign : *Théodore de la Peyrade*, and add in your own hand, *Avocat, Rue Saint-Dominique-d’Enfer*, under the words *Accepted payable for ten thousand*. We will date it and come upon you for it, all in secret, to have a right to imprison you. The shipowners must hold some security when the captain and the brig are at sea.’

On the day following, the bailiffs of the Justice of the Peace (the County Court) obliged Céritet by taking secret proceedings ; he came in the evening to call on the lawyer, and everything was settled without any public fuss. The Tribunal of Commerce deals with a hundred such cases at every sitting.

The stringent rules of the Council of the Association of Paris Advocates are well known. This body, and that of the Attorneys, exercise strict discipline over their members. An advocate in peril of imprisonment for debt at Clichy would be erased from the register. Consequently, Cérizet, guided by Dutocq, had taken the only course against their puppet which could secure them each twenty-five thousand francs out of Céleste's marriage portion. Théodore, when he endorsed the bills, only thought that he was insuring his prospects; but as by degrees the horizon grew clearer, as he rose step by step, while playing his part, to a higher position in the social scale, his dream was to rid himself of his two associates. And now, when he asked Thuillier for twenty-five thousand francs, it was in the hope of buying back his bills from Cérizet at fifty per cent.

Nor is this a solitary instance, unfortunately, of such an infamous speculation; such transactions are common in Paris under forms too thinly disguised for the historian to omit them from an exact and complete picture of social manners. Dutocq, a chartered libertine, still owed fifteen thousand francs of the price of his office and connection, and in his hopes of success he also hoped, in familiar language, to stretch the tether till the end of the year 1840.

Till this hour, not one of these three men had shied or called out. Each felt his own strength and fully gauged the danger. Their distrust of each other was equal, their watchfulness and assumed confidence; and equally marked were their gloomy silence and looks when reciprocal suspicion was betrayed by their features or their words. For the last two months especially, la Peyrade's position had been acquiring all the strength of an independent stronghold. Dutocq and Cérizet had a powder barrel under the ship, and the slow-match was always burning; but the wind might blow the match out, and the devil might wet the powder magazine.

The instant when wild beasts are about to seize their prey always seems the most critical, and this moment was now at hand for these hungry tigers. Cérizet said more than once to Théodore by that revolutionary look which two sovereigns have seen within this century: ‘I made you King and still I am nobody. Not to be everything is to be nothing.’

In Cérizet a reaction of envy was gathering impetus like an avalanche. Dutocq saw himself at the mercy of his copying clerk, who had made money. Théodore only wished he could burn his two partners and their papers in two conflagrations. And they all three took too much pains to conceal their own thoughts not to guess the mind of the others.

Théodore lived between three hells as he thought of the chances of the cards, of how to play to his game, and of the future before him. His speech to Thuillier had been the utterance of despair; he had cast the lead into the depths of the old citizen’s waters, and had found only twenty-five thousand francs at the bottom.

‘And possibly nothing by the end of the month!’ said he to himself, as he went to his own rooms.

He felt intense hatred of the Thuilliers. But he held Thuillier by a harpoon that had entered into his deepest conceit, the scheme, namely, for a work called *De l’Impôt et de l’Amortissement* (on taxation and the redemption of the debt), in which he was to coördinate the ideas published by a Saint-Simonian paper, the *Globe*, lending them his own Southern colour, and giving them a systematic shape. Thuillier’s knowledge of raw materials would be of great service to Théodore. On this rope he took his seat, determined to do battle, from this slender basis, with a fool’s vanity. This may be of granite or of sand; it depends on the man. But, on reflection, he was glad he had spoken.

‘When he sees me secure his fortune by paying over

the fifteen thousand francs at a moment when I am so much in need of money, he will look upon me as the god of honesty.'

Now this was what Claparon and Cérezet had done with the notary two days before that on which the time should expire allowed for raising the offer for the house. Cérezet, to whom Claparon gave the password and the notary's secret address, went to him and said:—

'One of my friends — Claparon, whom you know — begged me to call on you; he expects you the day after to-morrow, in the evening, at the place you know of. He has the paper you want of him, and you shall have it for the ten thousand francs, but I must be present at the delivery of the money, for five thousand francs of it are due to me — and I warn you, my dear sir, that the name on the secret agreement is left blank.'

'I will be there,' said the notary.

The poor wretch spent the night in such torment as may be imagined, for salvation or ruin hung in the scales for him. But at sunrise, instead of Claparon he saw a policeman in the uniform of the Chamber of Commerce, bearing a judgment in due form and requiring him to come away to Clichy.

Cérezet had come to an understanding with one of the hapless notary's creditors, and had promised to get him arrested in consideration of half the sum owed. Thus the victim of this piece of treachery was compelled to pay, on the nail, six thousand francs out of the ten thousand promised to Claparon, in order to avoid imprisonment; this was the whole amount of the debt.

As he netted his share of this swindle:—

'These thousand crowns,' said Cerizet, 'will enable me to get rid of Claparon.'

Cérezet went back to the notary and said to him:—

'Claparon is a rogue, monsieur! He has taken fifteen

thousand francs from the purchaser, who will certainly remain the owner. Threaten him with telling his creditors where he is hidden and with an indictment for fraudulent bankruptcy ; he will give you half readily enough.'

The notary, in a fury, wrote a fulminating letter to Claparon. Claparon, in his turn, dreaded an arrest, and Cérezet undertook to get him a passport.

' You have played me many a trick, Claparon,' said Cérezet ; ' but listen : you shall pronounce judgment on me — I have a thousand crowns and not another penny in the world. I will give them to you. Sail for America and there found your fortune as I am making mine here.'

That evening, Claparon, disguised by Cérezet as an old woman, set out in the diligence for le Havre. Cérezet was now master of the fifteen thousand francs demanded by Claparon, and he awaited la Peyrade calmly and without haste. This man, of really remarkable intelligence, had a bidder who, under the name of a creditor, for two thousand francs, was to make a bid, but not soon enough to save the sale. This was an idea of Dutocq's which he proceeded to put into execution. Fifteen thousand francs more must be insisted on to bribe this new bidder ; consequently he would get seven thousand five hundred more ; and he needed it to settle an affair absolutely similar to that of Thuillier, pointed out to him by Claparon, who was stupefied by disaster. The matter in question was a house in the Rue Geoffrey-Marie, which was to be sold for sixty thousand francs. The Widow Poiret offered him ten thousand francs, the wine-merchant did the same, and bills for ten thousand more. These thirty thousand francs and what he was to get, added to six thousand that he had of his own, allowed him to tempt fortune with all the more reason because the twenty-five thousand due from la Peyrade seemed a certainty.

' The time is up,' thought Théodore, as he went to ask

Dutocq to send Céritet to see him, ‘suppose I try to shake off my leech.’

‘You can only settle this business in Céritet’s office, since Claparon is in it,’ said Dutocq.

So between seven and eight o’clock Théodore made his appearance in the usurer’s den, Dutocq having announced in the morning that the man of capital intended to call.

La Peyrade was ushered into the hideous kitchen where misery was made into mince-meat, and where the tortures were concocted of which we have had a glimpse. The two men walked up and down the room exactly like beasts in a cage while playing this scene.

‘Have you brought the fifteen thousand francs?’

‘No, but I have them at home.’

‘Why not in your pocket?’ said Céritet with asperity.

‘That I will tell you,’ replied the lawyer, who between the Rue Saint-Dominique and l’Estrapade had decided on his line of conduct.

The Provençal, while turning on the gridiron on which his partners had stretched him, had a bright idea that flashed from the heart of the hot coals. Danger has its moments of illumination. He would trust to the power of truthfulness, which can move any man, even a scoundrel. A duellist is almost always favourably disposed towards an adversary who strips to the waist.

‘Hm!’ said Céritet. ‘Now the fun begins!’

The words were sinister, and spoken through his nose with an ominous accent.

‘You have placed me in a splendid position, and I will never forget it, my good friend,’ said Théodore, with deep feeling.

‘Oh! If that’s all!’ said Céritet.

‘Listen to me. You do not know what my intentions are.’

‘Indeed I do!’ replied the usurer.

‘No.’

‘You do not intend to pay up those fifteen thousand — ’

Théodore, with a shrug, looked hard at Cérizet, who, startled by his expression, stopped short.

‘Would you stand in my place, knowing that you were within range of a gun loaded with grape-shot, without wanting to put an end to the situation? Now, just listen to me. Your business is very risky, and it would be a good thing for you to have a trustworthy protector at the headquarters of justice in Paris. I, by going steadily on my way, may, in three years, be public prosecutor, or even advocate-general. Now and here, I offer you an unfailing friendship which will certainly serve your turn if only to recover a respectable position later. These are my conditions — ’

‘Conditions !’ exclaimed Cérizet.

‘Within ten minutes I will bring you twenty-five thousand francs, in exchange for all the claims you hold against me.’

‘And Dutocq, and Claparon ?’ cried Cérizet.

‘Leave them in the lurch,’ whispered Théodore, in his friend’s ear.

‘That is a neat trick !’ retorted Cérizet. ‘And you have invented this little thimble-rig since you had fifteen thousand francs in your palm which don’t belong to you !’

‘I have added ten thousand. And, after all, we know each other.’

‘If you can get ten thousand francs out of your old buffers,’ exclaimed Cérizet eagerly, ‘you can extract fifteen. Thirty thousand and I’m your man. If you are frank, so am I.’

‘You ask for the impossible !’ exclaimed Théodore. ‘At this moment, if you had a Claparon to deal with, your fifteen thousand francs would be gone, for the house belongs to Thuillier.’

‘I will go and tell him,’ replied Cérizet, pretending to go and consult Claparon upstairs in the room whence

Claparon had departed, packed into a hackney cab, ten minutes before Théodore came.

The antagonists had, as may be supposed, talked in undertones, and if Théodore raised his voice, Cérizet conveyed to him by a gesture that Claparon might be listening. The five minutes during which la Peyrade heard a hum of two voices, as he believed, were agonizing, for his whole life was at stake.

Cérizet presently came down, a smile on his lips, his eyes sparkling with infernal malice, tremulous with glee, terrific in a cheerful mood.

‘I know nothing myself,’ said he, shrugging his shoulders, ‘but Claparon has friends; he has been working for bankers of the upper class, and he went into fits of laughter, saying, “Just what I expected!” — You will have to bring me those twenty-five thousand francs you offered me, and to redeem your bills all the same, my boy.’

‘And why?’ asked Théodore, feeling his spinal marrow turn fluid, as if melted by the discharge of some internal electric shock.

‘The house is ours!’

‘How is that?’

‘Claparon bid a higher price in the name of the first man who proceeded against him, a little toad named Sauvagnou. Desroches, the attorney, has the matter in hand, and you will have formal notice to-morrow morning. It is such a capital job that it is worth our while — Claparon’s, Dutocq’s, and mine — to find the cash. Where should I be without Claparon? And I have forgiven him. I forgive him, and though you may hardly believe me, my dear fellow, we have kissed and made friends. You must modify your conditions.’

The last words were appalling, especially as emphasised by Cérizet’s countenance; he was allowing himself the pleasure of playing a scene out of *Le Légataire*, while studying the Provençal character.

'Oh! Cérezet,' cried Théodore, 'and I meant so well by you!'

'You see, my dear boy,' replied Cérezet, 'between you and me, this is what is wanted!' And he struck his heart. 'You have none. As soon as you fancy you have a hold over us you try to squeeze us flat. I rescued you from the horrors of vermin and starvation, but you will die like a fool. We brought you face to face with fortune; we slipped you into the handsomest society-skin; we put you where you had only to help yourself—and after all that! Now I know you. We march under arms.'

'This is war!' said Théodore.

'You fired first,' said Cérezet.

'But if you do for me, good-bye to all your hopes; and even if you let me alone, you make me your enemy.'

'That is what I said yesterday to Dutocq,' said Cérezet coolly. 'But what can I do? We will choose between the two alternatives, and act according to circumstances. I am a good sort,' he went on, after a pause; 'bring me that twenty-five thousand francs to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and Thuillier shall keep the house. We will still do our best for you, at both ends, and you must pay. . . . Now, after what has passed, my boy, is not that very handsome treatment?'

And Cérezet slapped him on the shoulder with a sort of cynicism that was a worse brand than that of the executioner's iron.

'Well, give me till midday,' said the Provençal, 'for there will be a tough pull, as you say.'

'I will try to persuade Claparon, but he is a man in a hurry.'

'Well, then, till to-morrow,' said Théodore, in a tone of determination.

'Good-night, my friend,' said Cérezet, in a nasal tone, which degraded the noblest word in the language. 'There is a fellow who has powers of suction!' said he to himself,

as he watched Théodore walking down the street with the uncertain gait of a bewildered man.

When Théodore turned into the Rue des Postes, he went at a swift pace to the Collevilles' house, working himself up by talking aloud. And under the heat of his seething passions, the sort of interior fire that is known to many Parisians — for such hideous situations are common enough in Paris — he rose to a pitch of frenzy and rhetoric which one word will depict. At the corner of the Rue Saint-Jacques du Haut-Pas, in the Rue des Deux Eglises, he cried aloud : —

‘ I will kill him ! ’

‘ There is a man who is not best pleased ! ’ observed a workman, whose ironical comment served to quench the incandescent madness that was coming upon Théodore.

As he left Céribet, the idea had occurred to him of confiding in Flavie, and confessing everything to her. This is the way with Southern natures ; strong up to the verge of certain passions which overbalance them.

He went in. Flavie was alone in her room ; when she saw Théodore she thought he had come to possess her or to kill her.

‘ What is the matter ? ’ she cried.

‘ The matter ! — Do you love me, Flavie ? ’

‘ Can you doubt it ? ’

‘ Wholly, positively — even as a criminal.’

‘ Has he murdered somebody ? ’ thought she. She answered with a nod.

La Peyrade, thankful to clutch at that willow-bough, crossed from his chair to the sofa, and two streams of tears flowed from his eyes, with sobs that would have touched the heart of an old judge.

‘ Not at home to anybody ! ’ Flavie called out to the maid.

She shut the doors and came back to Théodore, feeling herself moved to the most maternal pity. She found the

son of the South stretched at full length, with his head thrown back, and crying bitterly. He had taken out his handkerchief, and when Flavie tried to take it from him it was soaked in tears.

‘But what is it? What is the matter?’ she asked.

Nature, keener far than art, served Théodore well; he was not playing a part now; he was himself; these tears, this hysterical weeping, were the signature to the farce he had been acting.

‘You are a baby!’ said she in soft tones, as she stroked Théodore’s hair, and his eyes grew dry.

‘You are to me the only creature in the world!’ cried he, kissing Flavie’s hands with a sort of frenzy, ‘and if you are true to me—if you are to me as the body is to the soul—nay, as the soul is to the body,’ he added, correcting himself with much grace, ‘then, then, I can have courage.’

He rose and paced the room.

‘Yes, then I can fight; I can recover my strength, like Antæus, by embracing my mother. And I will throttle in my grasp the serpents that entwine me, that give me serpents’ kisses, that slaver my cheeks, and thirst to suck my blood—my honour! Oh! What a thing is poverty! How great are the men who can stand and face it with a proud mien! I should have done better to let myself die of hunger on my camp-bed three years and a half ago. The grave is a couch of ease as compared with the life I lead. For eighteen months I have been crammed with respectable citizens, and just as I had a chance of an honest and happy existence, of a splendid future—just as I was stepping forward to take a seat at the table of the world’s banquet, the executioner must tap me on the shoulder. Yes! the ruffian taps me on the shoulder and says, “Pay your tithe to the devil, or die!” And am I not to trample on them, not to ram my fist down their throats to their very bowels! But I will, oh, yes, I will! You see, Flavie, my eyes are dry. Oh, I can laugh, now; I feel my power,

and I have recovered my strength. Tell me that you love me; tell me again. The words at this moment are like the word "Pardon" to a criminal.'

'You are terrible, my dear!' said Flavie, 'oh, you are crushing me!'

She could not understand, but she sank onto the sofa, half dead and overset by this scene. Théodore fell on his knees before her.

'Forgive me, forgive me,' he cried.

'But what is it all about?' said she.

'They are bent on ruining me. Oh! promise me that I shall marry Céleste, and you will see what a happy life you shall share. If you hesitate—well, that will mean that *you* shall be mine—I will have you!'

And he started forward with such vehemence that Flavie was terrified, and began to walk about.

'Ah, my angel! At your feet -- there—a miracle! God is certainly on my side; I had, as it were, a lightning flash! A sudden idea came to me! Thanks, thanks, my good angel, great Theodosius! Thou hast saved me!'

Flavie admired this chameleon creature; kneeling on one knee, his hands crossed on his breast, and his eyes raised to heaven in religious rapture, he repeated a prayer; he was the most fervent Catholic; he crossed himself. It was as glorious as the ecstasy of Saint Jerome.

'Good-bye,' said he, with a tone of melancholy that was fascinating.

'Oh!' cried Flavie, 'leave me that handkerchief.'

Théodore ran downstairs, like a lunatic, into the street, and away to the Thuilliers'; but he looked round, saw Flavie at her window, and waved his hand in triumph.

'What a man!' said she to herself.

'My dear fellow,' said Théodore to Thuillier, in a calm, soothing, almost coaxing voice, 'we are in the power of atrocious villains, but I am going to give them a little lesson.'

'What is wrong?' said Brigitte.

‘Why, they want twenty-five thousand francs, and to get the law on their side, the notary, or his accomplices, have outbid us. Put five thousand francs in your pocket, Thuillier, and come with me; I will secure the house for you. I am making myself mortal enemies!’ he exclaimed. ‘They will be the death of me, morally speaking. So long as you despise their vile calumnies, and never change to me, that is all I ask. And what is it, after all, but this? If I succeed, you will have paid a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs for the house instead of a hundred and twenty.’

‘And it will not begin again?’ asked Brigitte, very uneasily; her eyes were dilated with horrible suspicion.

‘Only the creditors on the schedule have a right to raise the price, and as this one only has exercised it, we are safe. His claim is for no more than two thousand francs, but in a business of this sort the attorneys have to be paid, and it is as well to make the creditor a present of a thousand francs.’

‘Go, Thuillier, and get your hat and gloves,’ said Brigitte; ‘you will find the money, you know where.’

‘As I have let fifteen thousand francs slip through my fingers for nothing, I will have no more money pass through my hands. Thuillier himself shall pay it,’ said Théodore, when he found himself alone with Brigitte. ‘You have saved at least twenty thousand francs over the bargain I made for you with Grindot. He thought he was working for the notary, and you have got a freehold house which, in five years, will be worth near on a million francs. It is at the corner of a boulevard.’

Brigitte listened, but with uneasy attention, exactly like a cat that smells mice under the floor. She looked into la Peyrade’s eyes, and in spite of her acute penetration she had her doubts.

‘What is it, little aunt?’

‘Oh! I shall be on tenter hooks till the house is ours.’

'You would give twenty thousand francs, now, wouldn't you,' said Théodore, 'to see Thuillier in undisputed possession? Well, you must remember that I have made twice as much for you.'

'Where are we going?' asked Thuillier.

'To call on Godeschal, whom we must employ as our attorney.'

'But we refused to let him marry Céleste,' exclaimed the old maid.

'That is the very reason I am going to him,' replied Théodore. 'I have a high opinion of him; he is a man of honour, and he will feel it a fine thing to do you a service.'

Godeschal, Derville's successor, had, for more than ten years, been Desroches's managing clerk. Théodore, who knew this, had heard the name spoken in his ear, as it were, by an inner voice, in the midst of his despair, and he saw a chance of placing the weapon, which Cérezet had aimed at him, in Claparon's hands. But first and foremost the advocate wanted to get into Desroches' office, and gain information as to the position of the foe. Godeschal alone, in virtue of the intimacy existing between a master and a head-clerk, could help him in this.

The attorneys of Paris, when they are on such terms as Godeschal and Desroches were, live in real brotherhood, and the result is a certain facility for arranging any matters that can be arranged. They obtain from each other, turn and turn about, such concessions as are admissible, applying the proverb 'One good turn deserves another,' which is acted on, in fact, in every profession, among ministers, officers, lawyers, and merchants, everywhere, indeed, where hostility has not raised too strong a barrier between the parties concerned.

'I am getting fairly good pay on this transaction,' is an argument which need not be spoken; it is expressed in a

gesture, a tone, a look. And as attorneys can always meet on this common ground, the matter is arranged. The counterpoise to this good-fellowship lies in what may be called the professional conscience. For instance, society is bound to believe the physician, who, as a witness in medical law says, ‘This substance contains arsenic;’ no consideration can overcome the professional pride of an actor, the sense of honour of a lawyer, the incorruptibility of a minister. And a Paris attorney says, with no less blunt frankness, ‘You will never get that done; my client is obstinate,’ and the adversary replies, ‘Well, well, we will see.’

Now, la Peyrade, a wide-awake person, had dragged his gown about the courts long enough to know that legal amenities would serve his purpose.

‘Wait in the carriage,’ said he to Thuillier, when they arrived in the Rue Vivienne, where Godeschal was now master of the office where he had served his apprenticeship. ‘You need not come up unless he undertakes the job.’

It was eleven o’clock at night, and la Peyrade was not disappointed in his expectation of finding a newly fledged attorney busy in his office even so late as this.

‘To what do I owe a visit from you, Monsieur l’Avocat?’ said Godeschal rising to meet la Peyrade.

Foreigners and country folks, and even people of fashion, may perhaps not know that advocates — or barristers — are to attorneys what generals are to marshals; there is a line of demarcation very strictly observed between the two classes of lawyers in Paris. However old an attorney may be, however competent, he must wait on the advocate. The attorney is the tactician who traces the plan of battle, collects the munitions of war, and sets everything in motion; the advocate does the fighting. It is no more ascertainable why the law gives a client two men instead of one, than why an author needs a printer and a bookseller. The Association of Advocates forbids the members to do any

legal act which is essentially the right or duty of the attorney. Very rarely does any great pleader set foot in an office ; they meet in court. Still, in society, these barriers do not exist, and occasionally an advocate, especially in la Peyrade's position, condescends so far as to call on an attorney ; but the cases are exceptional, and generally justified by some special urgency.

' Well, to tell the truth, the matter is serious, and a very delicate question must be settled by you and me. Thuillier is down stairs in a coach, and I have come to you not as a pleader, but as Thuillier's friend. You, and you alone, are able to do him an immense service, and I told him you had too noble a soul — for you are the worthy successor of Derville — not to place all your abilities at his command. This is the state of affairs.'

After setting forth, altogether to his own advantage, the trick he wished to balk by skill — for attorneys meet with more clients who tell lies than who tell the truth — la Peyrade proceeded to his plan of campaign.

' You, my dear Maître, must go this very evening to see Desroches, explain to him the whole plot, persuade him to see his client Sauvaignou to-morrow morning ; among us we will extract the truth from him, and if he wants a thousand francs over and above what is due to him, we will fork out, to say nothing of five hundred to you and as much to Desroches, if Thuillier has a letter renouncing his bid before ten o'clock to-morrow morning. What can Sauvaignou want but his money ? Well, then, he is not likely to resist the bait of a thousand franc note, even if he is but the stalking-horse of some avaricious speculator. The conflict between those who are making use of him does not concern us. Come, get the Thuilliers out of this scrape.'

' I will be off to Desroches this instant,' said Godeschal.

' No ; not before Thuillier has given you a power of attorney, and paid you five thousand francs. In any case, cash in hand is essential.'

After an interview at which Thuillier was present, la Peyrade took Godeschal in the carriage to Desroches's office in the Rue de Béthisy, saying that they must go that way to the Rue Saint-Dominique-d'Enfer, and on Desroches's doorstep la Peyrade fixed for their next meeting at seven next morning. La Peyrade's future life and fortune depended on the upshot of this meeting; so we need not be astonished to find him overlooking the customs of his brotherhood by coming to Desroches's office in order to study Sauvaignou, and to mingle in the fray in spite of the danger he ran in venturing under the eye of the most formidable of Paris attorneys.

As he went in and made his bow he examined Sauvaignou. He was, as Théodore had supposed from his name, a Marseillaise, a superior workman, who filled the place of foreman or clerk of the works, intermediary between the master carpenter of the building and the workmen, and superintendent of the execution of the work. The profit of the contractor consists of the difference between the price fixed by the foreman and the price paid by the builder after deducting the cost of materials, in regard only to the labour.

The master carpenter having been made bankrupt, Sauvaignou had entered his name under a judgment of the Tribunal of Commerce as a creditor with a claim on the unfinished building, and had registered his claim. This little business was the end of the general collapse. Sauvaignou, a small, square man, wearing a grey drill blouse and a cap on his head, was seated in an arm-chair. Three bank-notes for a thousand francs each, lying before him on Desroches's table showed la Peyrade that the skirmish was over, and that the attorneys had failed. Godeschal's eyes were indeed eloquent, and the look flashed by Desroches on the advocate of the poor was like the stroke of a pick in a grave. Stimulated by danger, the Provençal rose to the occasion; he was grand; he laid his hand on the three notes and folded them up to put them into his pocket.

'Thuillier does not want to deal,' said he to Desroches.

'Then we are all agreed,' said the terrible attorney.

'Yes. Your client must repay fifty thousand francs spent on the structure under the contract between Thuillier and Grindot. I did not mention that to you yesterday,' he added to Godeschal.

'You hear that?' said Desroches to Sauvaignou. 'That will lead to a lawsuit that I cannot undertake without a guarantee.'

'But, gentlemen,' said Sauvaignou, 'I cannot say anything till I have seen the worthy man who gave me five hundred francs on account for having signed a power of attorney to him.'

'Are you from Marseilles?' said Théodore to Sauvaignou in the dialect of the district.

'Oh, if once he begins talking *patois* it's all up!' said Desroches to Godeschal in a whisper.

'Yes, Monsieur.'

'Well, my poor boy,' Théodore went on, 'they only want to ruin you. Do you know what you had better do? Pocket these three thousand francs, and when the other man comes take your foot-rule and give him a thrashing, and tell him he is a rascal, that he was trying to make a cat's-paw of you, that you revoke the power of attorney, and will return him his money when two Sundays come in the middle of the week. And then, with these three thousand francs and whatever you have saved, get off to Marseilles. And if anything goes wrong, come to this gentleman. He will always know where to find me, and I will get you out of the scrape; for not only am I a good Provençal, but I am one of the leading advocates in Paris, and the friend of the poor.'

When the workman found support in a fellow-countryman, sanctioning the reasons he had for playing the usurer false, he capitulated, bargaining for three thousand five hundred francs.

The fifteen hundred francs being granted, ‘Not a bad haul !’ said Sauvaignou, ‘and it’s worth it, for he may have me up for breach of contract.’

‘No. Do not strike the blow till he begins to talk big; then it will be self-defence.’

When Desroches had assured him that la Peyrade was an advocate in practice, Sauvaignou signed the deed of renunciation, including a receipt for the costs, interest, and principal of his claims, in duplicate as between Thuillier and himself, each witnessed by their respective attorneys that the discharge might be final.

‘We leave you the fifteen hundred francs,’ said la Peyrade confidentially to Desroches and Godeschal, ‘on condition of your handing over the discharge to me. I will take Thuillier to sign it before Cardot, his notary; the poor man never closed an eye all night.’

‘Very well,’ said Desroches. ‘And you,’ said he, as he made Sauvaignou write his name, ‘may congratulate yourself on having earned fifteen hundred francs with great ease.’

‘But are they really mine, Master Scrivener?’ asked the Provençal uneasily.

‘Oh, quite lawfully !’ replied Desroches. ‘Only you must now revoke the powers you placed in the hands of your representative, dated yesterday. Go into my office there — through there.’

Desroches explained to his head clerk what was to be done, and desired one of his pupils to take care that the messenger was at Céritet’s before ten o’clock.

‘I am infinitely obliged to you, Desroches,’ said la Peyrade, pressing the attorney’s hand. ‘You think of everything; I shall not forget this service.’

‘Do not hand your bid in to Cardot till after twelve o’clock.’

‘And you, old boy,’ cried Théodore to Sauvaignou, ‘take your Poll to Belleville for the day; don’t go home, whatever you do.’

'I understand,' said Sauvaignou, 'nabbed to-morrow!'

'I believe you,' said la Peyrade, with a peculiar Provençal cry.

'There is something beneath all this,' said Desroches to Godeschal, just as the advocate came back into the private room from the office.

'The Thuilliers have secured a fine property for nothing, that's all,' said Godeschal.

'La Peyrade and Céribet are to me just like two divers fighting under water. What am I to say to Céribet, who sent the job to me?' asked Desroches of the lawyer, after making this keen remark in an undertone.

'That Sauvaignou forced your hand,' replied la Peyrade.

'And you are not afraid?' said Desroches, point blank.

'I!' said Théodore. 'I can give him points!'

'I will know all about it to-morrow,' said Desroches to Godeschal. 'A beaten man will always blab.'

La Peyrade went off with his declaration. By eleven o'clock he was in waiting on the magistrate, calm and resolute, and as he saw Céribet come in pale with rage, his eyes glistening with venom, he said in his ear: —

'My dear fellow, I am good-natured too! I still have the twenty-five thousand francs at your service in exchange for all the bills you hold in my name.' Céribet looked at him, incapable of saying a word; he was green; his bile had risen.

'I am a landowner, in full possession!' exclaimed Thuillier, as he came home from seeing Jacquinot, Cardot's son-in-law and successor. 'No human power can deprive me of my house; they have told me so.'

Middle-class men believe a notary far rather than an attorney; the notary is closer to them than any other ministerial official. A Paris citizen is not without some alarm when he goes to see his attorney, whose pugnacious daring bewilders him, while he always goes with fresh pleasure to call on the notary, and admires his wisdom and good sense.

‘Cardot, who is looking out for a handsome residence, is ready to take a second floor apartment,’ said he, ‘and on Sunday, if I like, he will introduce me to a landlord who will take the whole house to sublet, for a lease of eighteen years, at forty thousand francs a year, he to pay the rates and taxes. What do you think, Brigitte?’

‘We must wait,’ replied she. ‘Ah! our dear Théodore gave me a terrible fright.’

‘Hallo! My dear. But you do not know that Cardot asked me who had put me in the way of this stroke of business, and said I owed him a present of ten thousand francs, at least. In fact, I owe him everything.’

‘But he is like our own child,’ replied Brigitte.

‘Poor boy, and to do him justice, he asks for nothing.’

‘Well, my dear fellow,’ said la Peyrade, coming in from court at about three o’clock, ‘so here you are, immensely rich!’

‘And by your act, my dear Théodore?’

‘And you, little aunt; are you alive again? You were not half so frightened as I was. I take more care for your interests than for my own. I did not breathe freely till eleven o’clock this morning; and now I am certain I have two mortal foes at my heels in the two men I have thrown over for you. As I came home I could not help wondering what the influence was that you have over me to make me commit this kind of crime, and whether the happiness of being one of your family, of becoming your son, can wipe out the stain I feel on my conscience.’

‘Pooh, you will get rid of it at confession,’ said Thuillier, the free-thinker.

‘Now,’ Théodore went on to Brigitte, ‘you can pay the price of the property in perfect security, eighty thousand francs, and thirty thousand to Grindot; a hundred and twenty thousand francs in all; with your share of the costs, these last twenty thousand make it up to a hundred and forty thousand. If you let the house to a tenant for

subletting, make him pay a year's rent in advance, and reserve the first floor above the entresol for my wife and me. Even then you can get forty thousand francs a year, for twelve years. If you should wish to leave this neighbourhood and live nearer to the Chamber, you will have ample room to live with us in that spacious first floor, reserving the coach-house and stables and everything needed for a handsome style of living. And now, Thuillier, I mean to get you the Cross of the Legion of Honour.'

At this last flash of hope Brigitte exclaimed :—

'On my word, boy, you have managed our business so well, that I leave it to you to conclude the bargain for the house.'

'Do not abdicate, my lady aunt,' said Théodore. 'And God preserve me from ever taking a step without you ! You are the good genius of the family. I am thinking only of the day when Thuillier sits in the Chamber. You will have forty thousand francs in hand within the next two months ; and that will not hinder Thuillier from getting his ten thousand francs at the end of the first quarter.'

Having given the old maid this hope, and leaving her jubilant, he led Thuillier into the garden, and without beating about the bush, he said :—

'My dear fellow, find some excuse for asking your sister to give you ten thousand francs, and never let her suspect that they pass into my hands. Tell her the money is insisted on in the office to enable you to be made *chevalier* of the Legion of Honour, and that you know to whom to give it.'

'That will do,' said Thuillier. 'Besides, I can repay her out of the rent.'

'Get the cash by this evening, my good fellow ; I am going out to see about the Cross, and to-morrow we shall know where we are.'

'What a man you are !' cried Thuillier.

'The Ministry will not stand much longer, we must get this out of them !' said Théodore shrewdly.

La Peyrade hastened off to see Madame Colleville, and said, as he went in :—

'I have won ! We shall have secured a property worth a million francs for Céleste ; Thuillier will settle it on her in reversion, by her marriage contract. But we must keep the secret, or Céleste will have peers of France paying court to her. And the settlements will have to include me. Now dress, and come with me to call on the Comtesse du Bruel ; she can get the Cross for Thuillier. While you are putting on your war-paint, I will go and say something pretty to Céleste ; you and I can chat in the carriage.'

La Peyrade had caught sight of Céleste and Félix Phellion in the drawing-room ; Flavie had such perfect confidence in her daughter that she had left her with the young professor.

Since the grand triumph he had won that morning, Théodore felt the necessity of paying his first addresses to Céleste. The moment for getting up a quarrel between these two had come ; he did not hesitate to put his ear to the drawing-room door, before going in, to hear what little of the word love they had by this time come to, and he was really invited, so to speak, to commit this domestic breach of faith by certain tones of voice which led him to conclude that they were quarrelling. Love, says one of our poets, is the privilege in which two beings indulge of causing each other a great deal of grief over nothing at all.

Having, once for all, made Félix the choice of her heart as her companion for life, Céleste felt less desire to study his character than to become united to him by that communion of soul which is the foundation of all true affection, and which in young minds means an involuntary cross-questioning. The dispute which Théodore was fated to overhear had its origin in a difference of opinion which

had simmered for some days between the mathematician and Céleste.

The girl, the outcome, morally, of the period when Madame Colleville was endeavouring to repent of her sins, was immovably pious ; she was of the true flock of the faithful, and in her unflinching Catholicism, tempered by the mysticism which appeals to youthful souls, was the poetry of her heart, the life within her life. From this stage girls go on to be saints or very frivolous women. But during that phase of their youth they have in their souls a touch of dogmatism, the ideal of perfection is always before the eye of their fancy, for them everything must be celestial, angelic, or divine. Nothing outside that ideal can be allowed to exist ; everything else is mud and filth. And this idea often leads to the rejection of a flawed diamond by a girl, who, as a woman, will worship paste.

Now Céleste had discerned that in matters of faith Félix was not irreligious but indifferent. Like most geometricalians, mathematicians, chemists, and great naturalists, he had subjected religion to argument, and had found it a problem as insoluble as the squaring of the circle. A deist at heart, he still professed the religion of most Frenchmen without attaching any more importance to it than to the laws of last July. There must be a God in heaven as there must be the bust of a King at the Mairie.

Félix Phellion, the worthy son of his father, had not attempted to conceal his mind ; he allowed Céleste to read it with the frankness and simplicity of an inquirer ; and the girl confused the religious and the practical questions ; she had a deeply seated horror of atheism, and her confessor had told her that a deist is first cousin to an atheist.

‘Have you remembered, Félix, to do what you promised me?’ asked Céleste as soon as her mother had left the room.

‘No, my dear Céleste,’ replied Félix.

‘Oh! can you break a promise!’ said she gently.

'It would be profanation,' said Félix. 'I love you so much, and my love makes me so weak to your wishes, that I promise a thing against my conscience. Conscience, Céleste, is our greatest treasure, our strength, our support. How could you wish me to go into a church to kneel before a priest who is to me no more than a man? You would have despised me if I had obeyed you.'

'And so, my dear Félix, you will not go to church?' said Céleste, with a tearful glance at her lover. 'If I were your wife, you would leave me to go alone? — you do not love me as I love you! — for till this moment I have cherished in my heart a feeling for an atheist antagonistic to what God would have in me.'

'An atheist!' cried Félix, 'no, no! Listen, Céleste. There is a God, no question; I believe in him; but I have a softer idea of him than your priests have. I do not lower him to my level. I try to rise to his. I listen to the voice he has placed within me which honest men call their conscience, and I try not to darken the rays of divine light that come to me. Never will I do anybody an injury, never will I sin against the law of universal morality which was that of Confucius, of Moses, of Pythagoras, of Socrates, and of Jesus Christ. I dwell in the presence of God; my actions are my prayers. I will never lie, my word is sacred, I will never do anything base or vile. These are the tenets I derive from my excellent father, and these I will bequeath to my children. I will do all the good I can in the world even if I should suffer for it. What more can you ask of a man?'

Céleste shook her head mournfully over this profession of faith.

'Read the *Imitation of Christ*,' said she, 'and read it attentively. Try to be converted to the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church, and you will understand how foolish your words are. Listen, Félix. According to the Church, marriage is not the affair of a day, the satisfaction

of desire; it is a bond for eternity. What, are we to live united by day and night, and be one flesh, one spirit, and can we have in our hearts two languages, two religions, a perpetual ground of dissensions? Would you condemn me to weeping in secret over the state of your soul; could I appeal to God if I constantly beheld his right hand armed to punish you? Your deistic blood, your convictions, might dwell in my children! Oh, Heaven, how many sorrows for a wife! No, the idea is intolerable. O Félix, be of my faith, for I can never be of yours. Do not set a yawning gulf between us. If you loved me, by this time you would have read the *Imitation of Christ*.'

The Phellions, sons of the *Constitutionnel*, had no love of priests. Félix was so rash as to answer this sort of supplication uttered by a yearning soul.

'You are repeating a lesson taught you by your confessor, Céleste,' said he, 'and nothing is more fatal to happiness than the intervention of priests in domestic matters —'

'Oh!' cried Céleste, indignantly, for love alone had made her speak, 'you do not love me. The voice of my heart is not heard in yours. You have not understood me because you have not apprehended my meaning, and I forgive you, for you know not what you say.'

She wrapped herself in proud silence, and Félix went to the window, where he sat drumming with his fingers on the glass, a sort of music very familiar to those who lose themselves in bitter reflections. Félix, in fact, was putting these curious but crucial questions to his Phellion conscience:—

'Céleste is a wealthy heiress, and if I yield to her views in opposition to the voice of natural religion, it would be that I might make an advantageous marriage, which is a base action. As a father of a family I could not allow priests to have the smallest influence in my home; if I give way now, I shall be guilty of an act of weakness that would lead to many more, equally fatal to the authority of a husband and father. All this is unworthy of a philosopher.'

He went back to his beloved Céleste.

‘Céleste,’ said he, ‘on my knees I implore you not to confuse things which the law in its wisdom has divided. We live for two worlds, that of society and that of Heaven. Each one must go his own way to work out his salvation ; but as to social life, is not the observance of its law obedience to God ? Christ said, “ Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.” Cæsar is the political world. — Now, let us forget this little quarrel.’

‘A little quarrel !’ exclaimed the enthusiast. ‘I desire that you should have my heart, whole, as I would have yours, and you divide it into two parts ! Is not this dreadful ? You forget that marriage is a sacrament.’

‘Your priests have turned your brain !’ cried the mathematician, out of all patience.

‘Monsieur Phellion,’ said Céleste, hastily interrupting him, ‘enough of this subject.’

It was at this moment that Théodore thought it necessary to intervene ; he found Céleste pale and the young professor uneasy, as a lover must be who has just vexed his mistress.

‘I heard the word *enough* — has there been too much ?’ he asked, looking at Céleste and Félix by turns.

‘We were speaking of religion,’ replied Félix, ‘and I was explaining to Mademoiselle how fatal clerical influence must be to the privacy of home — ’

‘That was not the point, Monsieur,’ cried Céleste, with asperity. ‘The question is, can a husband and wife make but one heart when one is an atheist and the other a Catholic ? ’

‘Are there any atheists ? ’ cried Théodore, with an expression of the deepest amazement. ‘Can a Catholic marry a Protestant ? No salvation is possible for a couple excepting in absolute conformity on all points of religious opinion. I, to be sure, I am a native of the *Comtat*, and of a family which once gave a pope to Rome, for our

coat-of-arms is *gules*, a key *argent* with a friar carrying a church, and a pilgrim holding a staff *or*, and the motto, “*F'ouvre et je ferme*”—and I, I say, am fiercely immovable on the subject. However, in these days, thanks to the modern system of education, such discussions are not thought extraordinary! I, as I say, would not marry a Protestant even if she had millions—not even if I went mad for love of her! Faith admits of no discussion; *Una fides, unus Dominus*—that is my motto in politics.’

‘You hear!’ cried Céleste triumphantly, as she turned to Félix.

‘I am no bigot,’ la Peyrade went on. ‘I go to mass at six in the morning when no one sees me; I fast on Friday; in short, I am a son of the Church, and I would never begin any serious undertaking without preliminary prayer, after the manner of our forefathers. No one sees anything of my religion. During the Revolution of 1789 an incident occurred in my family which attached us all more closely than ever to our holy Mother Church. There was a poor Demoiselle de la Peyrade, of the senior branch, the owners of the little estate of la Peyrade,—for we are la Peyrade des Canquoëlle, though the two branches inherit reciprocally. This young lady had married, six years before the Revolution, a lawyer who, in the fashion of the time, was a Voltairean, that is to say, an unbeliever, or, if you choose, a deist. He took up revolutionary notions and went in for those pleasing rites of which you have heard, in honour of the goddess Reason. He came back to our part of the world soaked to fanaticism in the Convention. His wife was extremely handsome; he compelled her to play the part of Liberty. The unfortunate woman went mad—she died mad. Well, and in the present state of things we may very well see another 1793.’

This romance, invented on the spur of the moment, made so deep an impression on Céleste’s fresh and inno-

cent imagination that she rose and, bowing to the two young men, went to her room.

‘Monsieur ! what have you said !’ cried Félix, stricken to the heart by the cold glance which Céleste bestowed on him with an affectation of utter indifference. ‘She fancies herself figuring already as the goddess Reason.’

‘What, then, was the subject in dispute ?’

‘My indifference on religious matters.’

‘The curse of our age !’ replied Théodore, with solemnity.

‘Here I am,’ said Madame Colleville, appearing, very handsomely dressed. ‘But what is the matter with my poor child ? She is crying — ’

‘Crying, Madame ?’ exclaimed Félix. ‘Tell her, pray, that I will forthwith study the *Imitation of Christ*.’

And Félix went down-stairs with Théodore and Flavie, the lawyer pressing her arm significantly to make her understand that he would explain to her in the carriage what had so greatly agitated the young professor.

An hour later, Madame Colleville, with Céleste, Colleville, and Théodore, went in to dine with the Thuilliers. Théodore and Flavie led Thuillier into the garden, where Théodore said, ‘My dear fellow, you will have the Cross within a week. Here, this sweet friend will tell you all about our visit to Madame la Comtesse de Bruel — ’

And Théodore left them together on seeing Desroches approaching in the wake of Mademoiselle Thuillier. A fearful and chilling presentiment led him to go forward to meet the attorney.

‘My dear sir,’ said Desroches in la Peyrade’s ear, ‘I have come to see whether you can command twenty-five thousand francs, and two thousand six hundred and eighty francs, sixty centimes, for costs.’

‘Then you are acting for Cérizet ?’ cried the advocate.

‘He has handed the papers over to Louchard, so you

know what awaits you after arrest. Now, is Cérezet wrong in supposing you to have twenty-five thousand francs in your desk? You offered them to him, and to him it seems only natural that you should not keep them locked up —'

'I am much obliged for your kind intent,' said Théodore, 'but, my dear sir, I foresaw this move.'

'Between you and me,' said the attorney, 'you tricked him handsomely. The old rogue will go any lengths for revenge, for if you cast your gown to the sharks and go to prison he will lose every penny.'

'I!' cried Théodore. 'Oh, I will pay. But there are five more bills out each for five thousand francs; what does he mean to do with them?'

'Well, after this morning's business, I cannot say; but my client is a cunning dog and a mangy one; he has his little plans, no doubt.'

'Come, now, Desroches,' said Théodore, taking the lean, unbending attorney by the waist, 'are the papers still in your hands?'

'Do you mean to pay?'

'Yes; give me three hours.'

'Very good. Be at my place at nine o'clock. I will take your cash and give you the bills; but by half-past nine Louchard has them—'

'All right — to-night at nine,' said Théodore.

'At nine,' replied Desroches, whose eye had taken in the whole family then assembled in the garden.

Céleste, with reddened eyes, was chatting with her god-mother. Colleville and Brigitte, Flavie and Thuillier, were on the steps of the broad, double flight from the garden up to the entrance hall. Said Desroches to Théodore, who had led him back there:—

'You can certainly afford to pay your notes of hand.'

At a single glance Desroches had understood all that the advocate had taken in hand.

On the following morning, at break of day, Théodore

went to the ‘poor man’s banker’ to see what effect had been produced on the foe by the payment so punctually made overnight, and to make one more effort to free himself from this gad-fly.

He found Cérezet up and stirring, in colloquy with a woman, and was somewhat imperatively desired to keep his distance so as not to disturb the interview. This left la Peyrade at leisure to conjecture what gave this woman her importance,—an importance to which the usurer’s anxious expression bore ample testimony. Théodore had a suspicion, though a very vague one, that the purport of this conference would in some way affect Cérezet’s intentions, for he could see in the man’s countenance the complete change that comes of hope.

‘But, my good *Maman Cardinal*—’

‘Well, my worthy Monsieur—’ .

‘What do you want?’

‘You must make up your mind—’

Such beginnings or endings of sentences were the only gleams of light cast on the motionless listener by this eager conversation, carried on as it was lip to ear and ear to lip; and la Peyrade’s attention was riveted on Madame Cardinal.

Madame Cardinal was one of Cérezet’s chief customers. She was a costermonger trading in fish. Though Parisians may be familiar with this class of beings peculiar to their soil, foreigners never suspect their existence; and technically speaking, Madame Cardinal was worthy of the interest she had aroused in the lawyer. So many women of the type are to be seen in the streets that the ordinary foot-passenger pays no more heed to them than to the three thousand pictures in an exhibition. But here, in these surroundings, Madame Cardinal had all the importance of an isolated masterpiece, for she was a perfect example of her kind.

She stood high in muddy wooden shoes; but her feet, besides being carefully wrapped in sock-linings, were also

clad in stout, wrinkled stockings. Her print gown, heavy with a flounce of mud, showed the wear of the strap which supports the saleswoman's basket, cutting across the back rather below the waist. Her principal wrap was a shawl of rabbit-wool, so called, and the two ends were tied in a knot above her bustle, for this word alone can describe the effect produced by the strap across her skirts, bunching them up in a roll. A coarse knit, tied round her neck as a scarf, showed a red throat crossed with wrinkles, like the ice on the pool of la Villette after skating. On her head she wore a yellow bandanna twisted into a not unpicturesque turban.

Short and burly, with a fine high colour, Madame Cardinal no doubt relished her glass of brandy first thing in the morning. She had been handsome. Her 'pals' of the market accused her in their vigorous figure of speech of having earned many a day's wages by night. To bring her voice down to the pitch of civil conversation, it had to be stifled and subdued as if she were in a sick-room, and then it came thick and wheezy from a throat accustomed to shout the name of each fish in its season in tones that rang in the highest garret. Her nose *a la Roxalane*, her not ill-shaped mouth, her blue eyes, all that had once been beauty was buried in the rolls of superfluous fat stamped with the traces of a life in the open air. The stomach and bust were of an amplitude to please Rubens.

'And do you want to see me lying on straw?' said she to Céribet. 'What do I care for the Toupilliers? Am I not a Toupiller myself? — And how do you expect me to find these Toupilliers?'

This ferocious outburst was silenced by Céribet with a long hush-sh such as every conspirator submits to.

'Well, then, go and see what you can do, and come back again,' said Céribet, pushing the woman to the door and saying a few words in her ear.

'Well, my good friend,' said Théodore to Céribet, 'you have got your money.'

‘Yes,’ replied Céritet, ‘we have measured our claws — they are equally sharp, equally long, equally strong — what then?’

‘Am I to tell Dutocq that you were paid twenty-five thousand francs last night?’

‘Oh, my dear fellow, if you love me, not a word!’ cried Céritet.

‘Listen to me,’ said Théodore. ‘I must know once for all what you want. I am fully determined not to lie another twenty-four hours on the gridiron where you have put me. You may swindle Dutocq, I do not care a straw; but you and I must come to an understanding. Twenty-five thousand francs is a fortune, for you must have ten thousand francs made in business, and you have enough to be honest upon. Céritet, if you let me alone, if you do not hinder my becoming Mademoiselle Colleville’s husband, I shall rise to be attorney-general in Paris, or something very like it. You cannot do better than secure a friend in such high places.’

‘These, then, are my terms — not open to discussion; you may take ’em or leave ’em: You will secure for me the lease, for eighteen years, of Thuillier’s house as principal landlord, to sublet, and I will hand over to you one more of those I.O.U.’s of yours, receipted. I shall stand out of your way, and you must settle with Dutocq for the other four. You have done with me, and Dutocq is no match for you.’

‘Well, I agree to your terms if you will pay forty-eight thousand francs a year for the house, payable in advance, the lease to date from next October.’

‘Very good; but I give only forty-three thousand in cash; your bill will make up the forty-eight. I have seen the house, I have inspected it thoroughly; it is just what I want.’

‘One thing more,’ said Théodore. ‘You will help me to tackle Dutocq?’

‘No, no !’ said Céritet; ‘you have done him brown enough without my helping to bake him any more. You can toast him dry. There is reason in all things. The poor man does not know which way to turn for the last fifteen thousand francs to pay for his place, and it is quite enough for you to know that you can get your bills back for fifteen thousand francs.’

‘Well, then, give me a fortnight to get you your lease.’

‘Not a day beyond Monday next ! On Tuesday your bill for five thousand francs will be in Louchard’s hands, unless you pay on Monday or Thuillier has granted me the lease.’

‘Well, Monday, then !’ said Théodore. ‘Are we friends ?’

‘We shall be on Monday,’ replied Céritet.

‘Very well, till Monday. You will treat me to a dinner ?’ said Théodore, laughing.

‘At the *Rocher de Cancale*, if I have the lease. Dutocq too. We will have a laugh. It is a very long time since I laughed.’

Théodore and Céritet shook hands, saying,—

‘Till we meet again !’

It was not without reason that Céritet had been so easily mollified. In the first place, as Desroches would say, ‘Bile does not help business ;’ and the usurer had felt the truth of this too deeply not to take stock coolly of the position, and to bleed the crafty Provençal.

‘It is fair revenge,’ said Desroches, ‘and you have the fellow on the hip. Wring him dry.’

Now, in the course of the past ten years, Céritet had seen several men enriched by the business of subletting houses. The first leaseholder, in Paris, is to the owner what a farmer is to the landed proprietor. All Paris knows how one of the great tailors built a most sumptuous house at his own cost on the famous site of Frascati, paying

fifty thousand francs as the rent of this structure, which in nineteen years was to become the property of the ground landlord. Notwithstanding the expense of building — about seven hundred thousand francs — by the end of the nineteen years the profits are very considerable.

Cérezet, on the lookout for a business, had considered the chances of profit to be derived from renting the house which Thuillier had positively *stolen*, as he told Desroches, and he had seen that it could be let out for more than sixty thousand francs within six years' time. It had four shop fronts, two on each side, as it stood at the corner of a boulevard.

Cérezet expected to make ten thousand francs a year, at least, for twelve years, irrespective of incidental profits and premiums on renewals of the shop leases, which he would grant only for six years at a time.

He intended to sell the good-will of his money-lending business to Madame Poiret and Cardenet for ten thousand francs; he had more than thirty thousand in hand, so he was well able to pay the year's rent in advance, which the owner commonly demands from the first lessee as a guarantee. Cérezet had spent a night in bliss; he had slept with happy dreams; he saw himself on the high road to an honest business, to becoming a respectable citizen like Thuillier, like Minard, like a hundred others. He gave up the idea of purchasing the house that was being built in the Rue Geoffroy-Marie.

But he awoke to luck he little expected; he found Fortune standing before him pouring riches on him from her golden horn, in the person of Madame Cardinal.

He had always been on good terms with this woman, and for the last year he had promised her the sum requisite for the purchase of an ass and a small truck, that she might be able to trade on a larger scale, and go out of Paris into the suburbs. Madame Cardinal, the widow of a stalwart market porter, had an only daughter whose beauty

had been much praised to Cérizet by other women, his customers. Olympe Cardinal was about thirteen years of age when, in 1837, Cérizet had set up as money-lender, and, with a view to the vilest profligacy, he was most accommodating to the mother ; he raised her from the depths of misery, hoping to make Olympe his mistress. However, in 1838, the daughter had run away, and was no doubt ‘seeing life,’ to use the expression by which the people describe the abuse of the most precious gifts of nature and of youth.

Now, to seek a girl in Paris is like hunting for a bleak in the Seine — you must take the chance of a haul. Madame Cardinal, having treated a ‘pal’ to the *Théâtre de Bobino*, recognised her daughter in the leading lady, who for three years had been in the power of the leading ‘comic.’ The mother, charmed at first to find her progeny in gaudy, tinselled array, her hair dressed like a duchess’s, with silk lace stockings and satin shoes, applauded her first appearance on the stage ; but she presently shouted out from her seat :—

‘ You shall hear of me again, you blight on your mother ! I will see whether you rascally play-actors have a right to carry off girls of sixteen ! ’

She tried to get hold of the girl at the stage door ; but the damsel and her comic man had no doubt jumped over the footlights, and gone out with the public, instead of by the side door, where the Widow Cardinal and her ally, Madame Mahoudeau, made an infernal uproar subdued only by two functionaries of the police. These august authorities, before whom the two ladies moderated the pitch of their voices, pointed out to the mother that if her daughter was sixteen, she was of the age to go on the stage, so that instead of shrieking at the stage door for the manager, she could summons the girl before a magistrate or in a criminal what, whichever she preferred.

how xt morning Madame Cardinal thought she would at his Cérizet, since he worked under a justice of the

peace ; but before betaking herself to his den in the Rue des Poules she had been startled by the arrival of the porter from the house where her uncle lived, old Toupillier, who, as the messenger informed her, had but two days to live.

‘Well, how can I help that ?’ replied Madame Cardinal.

‘We put our trust in you, my dear Madame Cardinal ; you will not forget the good turn we are doing you. This is how things stand. In the last few weeks your uncle has not been able to stir, and he trusted me to go and collect the rents of his house in Rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth, and the arrears of dividends on a treasury bond he holds for eighteen hundred francs — ’

Madame Cardinal’s eyes, which had been wandering, suddenly assumed a stare.

‘Yes, my beauty,’ the worthy Perrache went on, — a little hunchback, — ‘and seeing that you are the only person that ever thought of him, and brought him a bit of fish now and then, and came to see him, perhaps he will remember you in his will. My wife has been nursing him and sitting up with him these last few days ; she has mentioned you to him, but he would not let us tell you how bad he was. But you see it is time you should drop in. Why, it is close on two months now since he has been to business.’

‘You may say, old leather-puncher,’ said she to the porter — a shoemaker by trade — as they walked at a great pace to the Rue Honoré-Chevalier, where her uncle lodged in a squalid garret, ‘that the hair would be thick in the palm of my hand before it ever entered my head that Uncle Toupillier was a rich man ! What, the godly old beggar of Saint-Sulpice ! ’

‘Aye ! ’ said the porter, ‘and he fed himself comfortably ; he took his deary to bed with him o’ nights — a fat bottle of Rousillon. My wife knows the taste of it ; but he always told us it was but six sous a bottle. He bought it at the wine-shop in the Rue des Canettes.’

'Now, no blabbing, my good man,' said the widow, as she parted from her informant. 'I will remember you — if there is anything.'

This man Toupillier, once a drum-major in the Guards, had entered the service of the Church two years before 1789 by becoming the *Suisse* or beadle of the Church of Saint-Sulpice. The Revolution had deprived him of his functions, and he fell into abject poverty. He then took up the business of painters' model, for he was a finely made man.

When the services of the Church were restored, he resumed the beadle's halbert; but in 1816 he was dismissed from office, as much for immoral conduct as for his political opinions; he was supposed to be a Bonapartist. However, by way of pension, he was allowed to stand by the door and offer holy water to the worshippers.

After this, a luckless business of which more will transpire ere long, deprived him of his sprinkler; still clinging to the church by hook or by crook, he obtained leave to sit outside the church door, a licensed beggar. There, being by this time seventy-two years old, he gave himself out to be ninety-six, and traded as a centenarian.

Nowhere in Paris could you see such hair or such a beard as Toupillier's. He walked bent almost double, holding a stick in a shaking hand, a hand tawny as with the lichen that grows on granite, and he held out the classic hat, greasy, broad-brimmed, and cobbled, into which alms fell freely. His legs, wrapped in linen rags, dragged a pair of wretched hempen shoes comfortably lined with stout horse-hair soles. He made up his face with ingredients that looked like the traces of severe illness and deep wrinkles, and he acted the senility of old age to perfection. After 1830 he was a hundred; in reality his age was eighty years. He was the chief of the beggars, the cock of the walk; and all who came to beg under the church porch, protected there from the persecutions of the police by

favour of the Suisse, the verger, the holy-water giver, and the parish church, paid him a sort of tribute-money.

When a chief mourner, a bridegroom, or a godfather, as he came out of church, gave a sum of money, saying, ‘Here, this is for you all ; no begging.’ Toupillier, as representative of the Suisse, pocketed three quarters of the dole, and gave his acolytes but one-fourth, and their toll was a sou a day. Money and wine were the passions of his later days, but he regulated his indulgence in drink and devoted himself to hoarding, not, however, to the neglect of his personal comfort. He drank only in the evening after the church was closed. For twenty years he went to sleep every night in the arms of intoxication, his last mistress.

By daybreak every morning he was at his post with all his munitions of war. From dawn till dinner — which he ate at Père Lathuile’s, made famous by Charlet — he gnawed crusts as his sole food, but with the craft of an actor, and such resignation as brought him abundant alms.

The Suisse and the holy-water man, with whom no doubt he had an understanding, used to say of him : —

‘He is the recognised church-beggar ; he knew the Curé Languet, who built Saint-Sulpice ; he was Suisse here for twenty years before and after the Revolution ; he is a hundred years old.’

This little biography, familiar to every worshipper, was the best of advertisements, no hat was better filled in all Paris. In 1826 he bought his house, and in 1830 invested in the funds.

Judging from the price of these two securities, he must have been making six thousand francs a year, and have turned them over by money-lending of the same type as Cérizet’s, for the house cost forty thousand francs and he invested forty-eight thousand in the funds. His niece, completely deceived, as were the porter’s family, the minor church officials, and the charitable souls, believed him poorer

than herself; and when her fish was getting high, she would take it to the poor man.

So she now thought herself justified in taking advantage of her liberality and her charity to an uncle who had no doubt a crowd of unknown relations, since she was the third and youngest of the Touillier daughters; she had four brothers, and her father, a truck-porter, had told her in her young days of three aunts and four uncles of variously luckless fortunes.

After visiting the invalid she returned at a hand-gallop to consult Cérizet, to tell him how she had found her daughter, and the reasons, suppositions, and indications which led her to believe that Uncle Touillier hid a pile of gold in his wretched mattress. Madame Cardinal quite understood that she was not clever enough unaided to get possession of the inheritance by either fair or foul means, so she put her trust in Cérizet.

The petty usurer, like a rag-picker in luck, had at length found some diamonds in mire he had been raking for four years in the hope of one of those strokes of chance which occur, it is said, in the heart of these districts whence rich men sometimes emerge in wooden shoes. This was the secret of his civility to the man whose ruin was a sealed doom. His anxiety may be imagined as he awaited Madame Cardinal's return after showing her how she might verify her suspicions as to the existence of the treasure, promising her complete success if only she would leave it to him to harvest the crop. This dark and wily conspirator was not the man to hesitate at a crime, especially if he could commit it by other hands than his own while absorbing the profits. Then he would buy the house in the Rue Geoffroy-Marie, and see himself at last a citizen of Paris, a capitalist in a position to carry on an extensive business.

'My Benjamin,' said the costermonger, coming with a purple face, the result alike of greed and of her swift return, 'my uncle is lying on more than a hundred thousand

francs in gold pieces, and I am positive that the Perraches, under pretence of nursing him, have an eye on the cash.'

'That will not be much, divided among forty heirs,' said Cérezet. 'Listen to me, mother; I will marry your daughter; give her your uncle's gold, and I will give you the income from the house and securities for life.'

'And we shall run no risk?'

'None whatever.'

'Done!' said Madame Veuve Cardinal, clasping hands with her future son-in-law. 'Six thousand francs a year — a jolly life!'

'And me for a son-in-law, into the bargain,' added Cérezet.

'Now,' said Cérezet, after a pause in which the couple embraced each other, 'I must go and inspect the ground. Do not leave this place. Tell the porter you are expecting a doctor — the doctor, that's me. Pretend you do not know me.'

'You are a sharp one, you old rogue!' cried the woman, giving Cérezet a slap on the stomach by way of farewell.

An hour later, Cérezet, dressed in black, disguised in a red wig and an artistically made-up face, arrived at the Rue Honoré-Chevalier in a decent hired vehicle. He asked the shoemaker porter to show him up to the room in which a pauper lodged named Toupillier.

'Then you are the doctor Madame Cardinal is expecting?'

Cérezet no doubt realised the gravity of the part, for he made no reply.

'Is it this way?' he asked, turning to one side of the court-yard.

'No, Monsieur,' replied the worthy Perrache, leading him to the back-stairs up to the garret where the patient lodged.

The inquisitive porter remained at liberty to cross-question the cab-driver, and we will leave him to the occupation of carrying out his investigations.

The house in which Touillier lived was one of those which are fated to be cut in half by the widening of the street, for the Rue Honoré-Chevalier is one of the narrowest in the neighbourhood of Saint-Sulpice. The owner, forbidden by law to raise or to repair the structure, was obliged to sublet the wretched tenement in the state in which he had bought it. It was a hideous building, consisting of one storey over the ground floor, with garrets above, and a sort of wing at the back on each side. The court-yard thus formed ended in a garden planted with trees, and let with the first floor rooms. This plot, divided from the court-yard by a railing, would have enabled a rich owner to sell the house to the municipal authorities to be rebuilt on the whole of the court-yard; but as it was, the whole of the first floor was sublet to a mysterious lodger who held himself aloof, and had evaded all the detective efforts of the porter and the curiosity of the other tenants.

This resident, now seventy years of age, had, in 1829, had a flight of steps thrown out of the end window of one of the wings looking on the garden, so as to be able to go down and walk in it without crossing the court-yard. The left-hand side of the ground floor was occupied by a book-stitcher, who had turned the stables and coach-house into work-rooms ten years since; the other half was rented by a binder. The binder and the stitcher each inhabited half of the garrets to the street. Those on one side of the yard were let, with the first floor, to the mysterious tenant; and Touillier paid a rent of a hundred francs for the loft over the other little wing to the left, to which there was a staircase dim in borrowed lights. The carriage entrance formed a bay, an indispensable

arrangement in a street so narrow that two vehicles could not pass.

Cérizet took the cord that served as a holdfast to climb the sort of ladder that led to the room where the aged beggar lay dying; the room offered the hideous aspect of poverty elaborately shammed.

Now, in Paris everything that is done to an end is done to perfection. The poor are in such matters as clever as shopkeepers are in dressing their windows, or as the falsely rich in getting credit.

The floor had never been swept; the tiles were invisible under a litter of dirt, dust, dried mud, and all the rubbish flung down by Toupillier. A wretched cast-iron stove with a pipe bricked into a closed fireplace was the most conspicuous object in this den. There was a recess with a bed in it, with green serge curtains hanging from a pole, and eaten into lace-work by moths. The window was almost opaque with the thick deposit of dirt, which made a blind unnecessary. The whitewashed walls had a fuliginous tone from the smoke of charcoal and turf burnt in the stove. There was a chipped water-jug on the chimney shelf, with two bottles and a cracked plate. A tumble-down, worm-eaten chest of drawers contained the man's linen and clean clothes. The rest of the furniture was a night-table of the commonest kind, a table worth perhaps forty sous, and two kitchen chairs almost bare of straw. The picturesque costume of the customary beggar hung to a nail, and beneath it, the formless hemp shoes he wore, with his enormous staff and his hat, composed a sort of panoply of pauperism.

Cérizet, as he went in, cast a rapid look at the old man, whose head rested on a pillow brown with dirt, and with no slip. His sharp profile, resembling the faces which engravers thought it amusing to make out of the precipitous rocks in a landscape, stood out darkly against the green curtain. Toupillier, a man nearly six feet high,

was staring hard at some imaginary object at the foot of his bed ; he did not move when he heard the door creak — a heavy door lined with iron and furnished with a strong bolt to protect his domicile.

‘ Has he his wits ? ’ asked Cérezet, and Madame Cardinal started back, recognising only his voice.

‘ Pretty well,’ said she.

‘ Come out on the stairs, then, that he may not hear us. This is what we must do,’ he went on, speaking in his future mother-in-law’s ear. ‘ He is weak, but he does not look badly, and we have quite a week before us yet. Besides, I will find a doctor to suit us. I will come in one evening with six poppy-heads. In the state he is in, you see, a decoction of poppy-heads will make him sleep soundly. I will send you in a truckle-bed under the pretext that you want to spend the nights with him. When he is asleep we will lift him on to the other bed, and when we have counted the money hidden in that precious piece of furniture, we shall easily find some means of removing it. The doctor will say that he has some days yet to live, and above all that he can make a will.’

‘ My son ! ’

‘ But we must find out who the tenants are of this wretched building. Perrache might give the alarm, and every lodger is of course a spy.’

‘ Well, I know already,’ replied Madame Cardinal, ‘ that Monsieur du Portail, who has the first floor, takes care of a mad girl whom I heard called Lydie, only this morning, by an old Flemish nurse named Katt. The old man has only one servant, an old man like himself, called Bruno, who does everything but the cooking.’

‘ But the binder and stitcher,’ said Cérezet, ‘ they work from early dawn. Well, we must see,’ he added, as a man having no fixed plan. ‘ At any rate, I will go round by the Mayor’s offices in your district to get a copy of Olympe’s register of birth and have the banns published. Next Saturday week, the wedding ! ’

'Go it, go it! old rascal!' said Madame Cardinal, giving her formidable son-in-law a friendly shove with the shoulder.

As Céritet went down-stairs he was surprised to see the little old man, this du Portail, walking in the garden with one of the foremost personages of the government, Count Martial de la Roche-Hugon. He hung about the court-yard examining the old house, built in time of Louis XIV.; its yellow walls, though of good masonry, were bowed like old Toupillier; he stared into the work-shops and counted the hands employed; then, finding himself observed, Céritet went away, reflecting on the difficulty of extracting the sum hidden by the sick man, small in compass as it was.

'How can I get it away at night? The doorkeeper is on the watch; by day twenty pair of eyes would be on me. It is not so easy to stow twenty-five thousand francs in gold about one's person.'

Social existence has two limit-lines of perfection. The first is a stage of civilisation in which the moral sense being equally developed does not allow of crime even in thought: the Jesuits have been known to reach this sublime height, which was normal in the primitive church; the second is a state of civilisation in which the mutual supervision of its members makes crime impossible. This, which is the stage aimed at by modern society, makes a felony so difficult to carry out that a man must be really out of his mind to attempt it. In fact, none of the misdeeds which the law fails to touch go unpunished; the social verdict is even more severe than that of any tribunal.

If a will is destroyed without a single witness to the deed, as was done by Minoret, the postmaster of Nemours, the crime will be traced by the keen eye of virtue, as a theft is detected by the police. No act of dishonesty goes undiscovered; wherever there is damage done, the scar remains discernible.

Things can no more be made away with than men, so

thoroughly are they numbered, especially in Paris, and houses watched, streets guarded, open places observed. Crime, to live at ease, needs sanction like that granted to the Bourse, like that given to Cérizet by his clients, who never complained and would only have been alarmed if they had failed to find their skinflint in his kitchen on a Tuesday morning.

'Well, my dear sir,' said the porter's wife, going out to meet Cérizet, 'how is the poor man, the favourite of God?'

'I am not the doctor,' said Cérizet, definitively giving up the part. 'I am Madame Cardinal's man of business. I have advised her to have a bed brought in so as to be at hand day and night to attend to her uncle; but perhaps he may need a nurse.'

'I could nurse him very well,' said Madame Perrache; 'I have been a monthly nurse.'

'Well, we shall see,' answered Cérizet. 'I will settle all that. Who lodges on the first floor?'

'Monsieur du Portail. Oh, he has lived here for thirty years. He is a gentleman of private means, sir, a highly respectable party. A man of means, who lives on his means, you know. He used to be in business. It is about eleven years since he began to try to restore the daughter of a friend of his to her right mind — Mademoiselle Lydie de la Peyrade. She is well cared for, I can tell you, by two of the most famous doctors. Why, only this morning they had a consultation. But up to now nothing has done her any good; indeed, she has to be closely watched, for sometimes she gets up in the night.'

'Mademoiselle Lydie de la Peyrade!' cried Cérizet. 'Are you quite sure of the name?'

'Madame Katt, the housekeeper, who does their little bit of cooking, has told me a hundred times; though, as a rule, neither Monsieur Bruno, the man-servant, nor Madame Katt will talk at all. As to asking them for information, it is like speaking to a wall. We have been porters here

these twenty years, and never heard a word about Monsieur du Portail. What is more, Monsieur, he owns that little house alongside. You see the door in the wall? Well, he can go out when he pleases, and let people in without our knowing anything about it. Why, the house-landlord himself knows no more than we do. If any one rings at the side door Monsieur Bruno goes to open it.'

'So you did not see the gentleman go in with whom the sly old devil is now talking?'

'Lord! — No, indeed.'

'This is the daughter of Théodore's uncle,' said Cérizet to himself, as he got into his cabriolet. 'Can this du Portail be the man who in past days sent that young rascal two thousand five hundred francs? Supposing I were to favour the old gentleman with an anonymous letter, telling him of the scrape his advocate nephew is in over the twenty-five thousand francs in promissory notes.'

An hour after this a complete camp-bed came in for Madame Cardinal, to whom the inquisitive porter's wife offered her services to provide her with food.

'Would you like to see Monsieur le Curé?' asked Madame Cardinal of the old man, for she observed that the arrival of the bed had roused him from his torpor.

'I want some wine,' said the sufferer.

'How are you feeling, Père Toupillier?' asked Madame Perrache, in her most insinuating voice.

'I tell you I want some wine,' repeated the man, with such determined energy as would not have been expected from his weak condition.

'We must know first if it will be good for you, Uncle Buncle,' said Madame Cardinal, in coaxing accents. 'Wait and see what the doctor says.'

'The doctor! I won't have one, I tell you. And what the devil are you here for? I want nobody.'

'My dear uncle, I came to see if anything would tempt your fancy. I have some nice fresh flounders. Now a

*teeny flounder, heh ! cooked in butter with a relish of lemon-juice ?*

‘ Much good will your fish do me,’ replied Toupillier ; ‘ it is sheer rottenness. The last you brought me, six weeks ago, is in the cupboard still ; you may have it back.’

‘ Mercy, how ungrateful these sick folks are !’ said the niece, in an undertone, to Madame Perrache.

Meanwhile, to show her solicitude, she settled the pillow under the sick man’s head, saying : —

‘ There, uncle ! Is not that better now ? ’

‘ Leave me alone,’ Toupillier bellowed, in a rage. ‘ I want to be let alone. Wine, I say, and leave me in peace.’

‘ Now, don’t be cross, uncle, and we will fetch you the wine.’

‘ Wine at six sous, Rue des Canettes !’ cried the beggar.

‘ Yes,’ said Madame Cardinal ; ‘ but wait till I count over my cash. I want to make your place look decent. Why, an uncle, you see, is a second father, and I should stick at nothing ! ’

She sat down, her knees wide apart, on one of the strawless chairs, and turned out all the contents of her pocket on her apron — a knife, a snuff-box, two pawn-tickets, some crusts, and a quantity of copper cash, from among which she finally extracted a few silver pieces.

This performance, intended to prove the most generous and zealous devotion, had no effect whatever. Toupillier did not seem even to have seen what she was doing. Exhausted by his delirious energy in demanding his favourite panacea, he made an effort to change his position, and, turning his back on his two nurses, after muttering again, ‘ Wine — wine ! ’ he uttered no further sound but the stertorous breathing that showed that the lungs and tubes were becoming clogged.

‘ I must get him his wine, at any rate,’ observed Madame Cardinal, restoring to her pocket all the cargo she had unloaded, in no pleasant mood.

'If you do not care to put yourself about, Mère Cardinal —' said the porter's wife, ready to offer her services.

The market-woman hesitated for a moment; then, reflecting that she might gain some light from a conversation with the wine-seller, and also that so long as Toupillier was hatching the treasure the woman might safely be left with him, she said: —

'Thank you, Madame Perrache, but I may as well get into the way of knowing the places where he shops.'

Noticing behind the night-table a dirty bottle that would hold at least two litres: —

'Rue des Canettes, I think he said?' she asked of the porter's wife.

'Corner of the Rue Guisarde,' replied Madame Perrache. 'Master Legrelu, a tall, handsome man with large whiskers and no hair on his head.'

Then lowering her voice, she added, —

'His six-sous wine, you know, is prime Roussillon. However, the wine-seller knows all about that. It will be enough if you say you have come from his old customer, the Saint-Sulpice beggar.'

'I don't need telling anything twice,' replied Madame Cardinal, opening the door but not leaving the room.

'By the by,' said she, coming back, 'I wonder what he burns in his stove, if I wanted to heat anything to do him good.'

'Bless you,' said the porter's wife, 'he can't have laid in firing for the winter; why, it is midsummer —'

'And not a pan or a pot of any kind,' the niece went on. 'What a way of living, good God! Nor a thing to go to fetch home provisions in, for I declare it looks dreadful mean to let everybody see what you have got at market.'

'I can lend you a flat basket,' said the porter's wife, anxious to oblige.

'No, thank you, I will get a market-basket,' replied the

fish-hawker, thinking more of what might have to be carried out of the house than of what she should bring into it. ‘There must be an Auvergnat somewhere near by who sells wood and charcoal?’

‘At the corner of the Rue Féron you will find what you want. A fine shop, too, with logs painted like faces in an archway over the door; you could believe they were going to speak to you.’

‘I can see it!’ said Madame Cardinal.

Before finally leaving she had an idea of the deepest hypocrisy. She had evidently hesitated to leave the woman alone with the sick man. She now said:—

‘Madame Perrache, you will not leave him, will you? — poor dear! — not till I come back?’

The reader may have observed that in embarking on this undertaking Céritet had no very definite plans as to the part he would play. That of a doctor, which he had at first thought of assuming, he was afraid of trying, and he had introduced himself to the Perraches as Madame Cardinal’s man of business. As soon as he was alone he saw more clearly the difficulties of the case; his first plan, complicated by a doctor, a nurse, and a notary, was encompassed by insurmountable obstacles. A will in favour of the niece could not be made on the spur of the moment. It would take a long time to accustom the old beggar’s suspicions and obstinate temper to the new idea, but death was at hand, and in the winking of an eye might balk his most elaborate preparations.

As to performing the scene from Regnard’s play *Le Légataire*, it was out of the question in the midst of the refined watchfulness of the police, and of a state of civilisation of which the first aim would seem to be to deprive the romance and drama of life of the last breath of vital air that remains to them.

By giving up the notion of persuading the old man to make his will, the eighteen hundred francs a year and the

house in the Rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth would of course go to the heirs-at-law, and Madame Cardinal, to whom he had hoped to secure these two items, would come in for no more than her share. Still, abandoning this visible portion of the estate was the surest way of appropriating what was hidden. Besides, if this could best be secured to begin with, what would hinder a subsequent attempt to get a will signed ?

So Cérizet, reducing the operations to the most simple terms, fell back on the manœuvre before mentioned of administering an infusion of poppy-heads and trusting to this mode of warfare alone. He was on his way back to Toupillier's lodgings to give Madame Cardinal fuller instructions when he met her with the basket she had just purchased on her arm. In it she had the desired panacea.

'Heyday !' said the money-lender, 'is this how you mount guard ?'

'I had to go out to get him some wine,' replied the woman. 'He bellowed out like a creature on hot bars that I was to leave him in peace, and that he wanted to be alone, and that I should give him his jorum ! The man is persuaded that strong Roussillon is the best cure for his complaint, and I am going to give him his bellyful ! When he is screwed he will be quieter perhaps.'

'You are right,' said Cérizet pompously. 'Sick people should never be contradicted ; you must medicate the wine by a little infusion of this' — and he raised one of the basket-lids and slipped in some poppy-heads, — 'you will secure the poor man a sound nap for five or six hours at least. I will look in this evening, and there will be nothing, I fancy, to hinder our investigating the value of the estate.'

'All right,' said Madame Cardinal, with a wink.

'Till this evening,' said the usurer, without more words.

He foresaw a difficult and discreditable business, and did not care to be seen talking to his accomplice in the street.

On returning to Toupillier's garret, the woman found him still in the same torpid state. She dismissed Madame Perrache, and went to the door to take in a small load of sawn logs which she had ordered of the Auvergnat in the Rue Féron. She had provided herself with an earthen pipkin, fitting the hole at the top of the stove on which poor folks set the pot to stew, and in this she placed the poppy-heads, soaking in two-thirds of the bottle of wine she had brought; she lighted a good fire beneath so as to get the decoction as soon as possible.

The crackling of wood, and the warmth that soon raised the temperature of the room, roused Toupillier from his heavy slumbers. When he saw a fire in the stove:—

‘What, a fire?’ cried he. ‘Do you want to burn the house down?’

‘Why, uncle,’ said Madame Cardinal, ‘I have bought the wood with my own money to take the chill off the wine. The doctor does not wish you to drink it cold.’

‘Well, and where is the wine?’ asked Toupillier, somewhat pacified by hearing that the cooking was not at his expense.

‘You must wait till it has boiled,’ replied she. ‘The doctor insisted on it. However, if you will be quiet I will give you just a drop to stay your stomach. I take the responsibility, and you must not tell.’

‘I will have no doctor! Scoundrels who put men out of the world,’ cried Toupillier, roused at the thought of a drink. ‘Now, where is that wine?’ he added, in the tone of a man whose patience has run out.

Quite sure that if her yielding did him no harm it would at any rate do him no good, the woman half-filled a wine-glass and held it with one hand, while with the other she raised him into a sitting posture to drink. Toupillier clutched the glass with his lean and greedy fingers, and having swallowed the contents at one gulp, he cried, ‘What a thimbleful! and watered at that!’

'No, you must not say that, uncle. I went myself to get it from Legrelu, and I have given it to you just as I bought it. But wait for the rest to simmer a bit; the doctor said you could have it whenever you were thirsty.'

Toupillier shrugged his shoulders and submitted; when, a quarter of an hour after, the mixture was ready, Madame Cardinal, without waiting to be asked, brought him a cup full to the brim.

The avidity with which he drank it gave the old man no time to observe that it was drugged; but at the last mouthful he was aware of a vapid, nauseous flavour, and flung the cup down on the bed, crying out that she had poisoned him.

'Well, look, that is all the poison in it,' replied Madame Cardinal, draining the few drops that remained at the bottom of the mug, and she then assured the old man that if the wine did not taste as usual it was because his mouth was foul.

By the end of this discussion, which was carried on for some time, the narcotic began to take effect, and in an hour the invalid was sleeping heavily.

While waiting for Céribet, having nothing to do, Madame Cardinal had an idea. It struck her that to facilitate the coming and going which might be necessary when the time came for removing the treasure, it would be well to mitigate the vigilance of the Perraches. So, after taking care to throw the poppy-heads away, she called the porter's wife and said:—

'Just taste his wine, Madame Perrache. Would you not have thought he was ready to drink a hogshead? And after one cupful he wants no more!'

'Here's to you,' said the woman, clinking her glass against that of Madame Cardinal, who took care to fill her own with pure wine.

Madame Perrache, not so keen a connoisseur as the old beggar, and drinking the wine cold, detected no flavour in

the insidious liquor which could lead her to suspect the narcotic ; on the contrary, she declared that it was ‘like velvet,’ and only regretted that her husband was not at home to take toll of it.

After a long chat the women parted. Madame Cardinal then made a meal off some cold meat she had bought, and the remains of the Roussillon in the bottle, and crowned it with a nap. To say nothing of the excitements of the day, the fumes of one of the strongest wines in the world would amply account for the soundness and length of her slumbers ; when she awoke it was already dark.

Her first care was to look at the sick man. His sleep was disturbed, and he was dreaming aloud.

‘Diamonds,’ said he, ‘diamonds ? When I am dead — not before.’

‘Hallo !’ said Madame Cardinal. ‘What next ? He has got some diamonds — ’

And seeing that Toupillier seemed to be suffering from a violent nightmare, instead of trying to relieve him by a change of position, she leaned over him to catch every word, in the hope of hearing some important revelation.

At this juncture a sharp tap at the door, from which this capital sick-nurse had taken care to remove the key, announced Céritet’s return.

‘Well ?’ said he, as she admitted him.

‘Well, he took the drug. He has been sleeping like a top these four hours. Just now, while dreaming, he talked about some diamonds.’

‘Bless me !’ said Céritet, ‘it would not astonish me to find some. When these paupers once set their heart on riches, there is nothing they will not pick up — ’

‘And pray, my good friend,’ asked the woman, ‘what possessed you to go and tell Mother Perrache that you were not a doctor, but my man of business ? We agreed this morning that you were to call yourself a doctor — ’

Céritet did not choose to confess that the assumption

of such a title had seemed to him too rash ; this might have frightened his accomplice.

'I saw that the woman was just going to consult me, and I got rid of her in that way.'

'I see,' said Madame Cardinal, 'great wits jump ! and it was my game, too, to turn matters the other way round ; that I should have a man of business here seemed to put notions into the cobbler-woman's head. Did the Perraches see you come in ?'

'I fancied I saw the woman asleep in her chair.'

'She ought to be,' said Madame Cardinal, with meaning.

'What ! Really ?' said Céritet.

'Enough for one is enough for two,' said the fish-hawker. 'I treated her to the rest of the mixture.'

'As to the husband, he is there, sure enough,' said Céritet, 'for as he pulled his thread he gave me a gracious nod of recognition which I could very well have dispensed with.'

'Wait till it is quite dark, and we will get up a little performance that will puzzle him a bit.'

And, in fact, a quarter of an hour later, the woman, with an amount of spirit that amazed the money-lender, carried through a little farce of seeing out a gentleman who pressed her to take no such trouble. Making a great show of escorting the doctor as far as the front gate, she pretended, half-way across the court-yard, that the wind had blown her candle out, and then, while trying to relight it, she extinguished Perrache's candle too. All this little scene, with a bewildering flow of exclamations and talk, was so dexterously managed that the porter, if called before the bench, would not have hesitated to swear that the doctor, whom he had seen come in, had come down and quitted the premises between nine and ten o'clock.

As soon as the partners were thus in quiet possession of the scene of their operations, Madame Cardinal quite

unwittingly acted on a hint of Béranger's, and for fear some prying neighbour might get a glimpse of their proceedings, she hung her rabbit-wool shawl over the window like a curtain, as though to screen Lisette's amours.

In the Luxembourg quarter the stir of life is over at an early hour. Before ten o'clock every sound had ceased, in the house as well as outside. One resident alone, bent on finishing an instalment of a novel, kept the conspirators in check for some little time; but no sooner had he placed the extinguisher on his candle than Céribet was anxious to set to work. By beginning at once there was a better chance that the sleeper would remain under the influence of the narcotic; also, if it did not take them too long to discover the treasure, Madame Cardinal might have the front door open to let her out, under pretence of having to go to the druggist for some remedy unexpectedly required. It might be hoped that the Perraches, after the manner of gatekeepers roused from their first sleep, would pull the latch-cord without getting out of bed. Thus Céribet could get out at the same time, and they could at once remove a part of the coin, at any rate, to safe hiding. As for the remainder, it would be easy to find some way of disposing of it in the course of the morrow.

Céribet, great in council, was but inefficient in action; without the woman's stalwart help he could never have lifted what may be called the corpse of the ex-drum-major. Dead asleep and absolutely unconscious, Toupillier was an inert weight which could fortunately be handled without any great caution. The athletic fishwife, doubly strong under the excitement of avarice, succeeded in transferring her uncle to the other bed without misadventure, and the mattress was eagerly searched.

At first they found nothing; the woman, being pressed to explain how she had persuaded herself in the morning that her uncle was lying on a hundred thousand francs,

was obliged to own that the gossip of the Perraches and her own perfervid imagination had been chiefly responsible for her alleged conviction. Cérizet was furious. After cherishing the idea and hope of a fortune for a whole day, and making up his mind to a rash and compromising undertaking, to find himself at last face to face with emptiness! The disappointment was so crushing that, had he not feared the worst from an encounter with his future mother-in-law, he would have been tempted to raging extremity.

At any rate, he could vent his passion in words. Madame Cardinal, violently attacked, would say no more than that all hope was not yet lost, and with the faith that removes mountains tossed the bed over from top to bottom, and was about to empty the mattress after rummaging it in all its corners, but that Cérizet would allow no such extreme measure, remarking that the autopsy of the bedding would leave a litter of straw on the floor which would give rise to suspicions.

Madame Cardinal, to leave no burthen on her conscience, insisted on removing the sacking bottom of the bed, in spite of Cérizet, who thought this absurd; and certainly the ardour of her search had sharpened her senses, for, as she lifted the wooden frame, she heard the sound of some small object falling out onto the floor. Ascribing to this trifle, which any one else might have overlooked, greater importance than seemed at all likely, the spirit of research moved her to take the candle, and after feeling about for some time in the filth that covered the ground, at last she laid her hand on a small object in polished steel, about half an inch long, of which the use was to her a perfect mystery.

'It is a key!' exclaimed Cérizet, who had looked on with no little indifference, but whose imagination now went off at a gallop.

'Aha! You see!' said Madame Cardinal, with exult-

ant pride. ‘But what can it belong to?’ added she, thoughtfully. ‘A doll’s trunk?’

‘Not at all,’ replied Cérizet. ‘It is a modern invention. Very strong locks may be opened with this little key.’

And as he spoke he glanced rapidly at all the furniture in the room, went to the chest of drawers and pulled them all out, peeped into the stove, under the table — nowhere could he see a sign of such a lock as the little key might fit.

Suddenly the woman had a flash of inspiration.

‘Stay,’ said she, ‘I remember that as he lay on his bed the old thief kept his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him.’

‘A cupboard concealed in the wall? That is not impossible,’ said Cérizet, eagerly taking up the candle.

But after having carefully examined the door in the recess, which faced the head of the bed, he found nothing but thick hangings of spiders’ webs and dust.

He then tried the sense of touch, which is in some ways keener, tapping and feeling the wall all over. At the spot off which Toupillier had never taken his eyes he certainly discerned the hollow sound of a space within, and at the same time he felt sure that he was tapping on wood. He rubbed the place hard with his handkerchief rolled into a ball, and under the layer of dirt that he had cleared away he presently found an oak plank closely fitted into the wall; at one edge of this board was a tiny round hole — the keyhole of the lock to which the key belonged.

While Cérizet turned the key, which worked without difficulty, Madame Cardinal, holding the light, stood pale and gasping. But, dreadful disappointment! When the cupboard was opened nothing was visible but an empty space, vainly illuminated by the candle she eagerly thrust forward.

Leaving this fury to fulminate exclamations of despair and to shower all the most abusive epithets of her vocabulary on her uncle, Cérizet preserved his presence of mind.

He put his arm into the opening and all round the bottom of it.

'There is an iron chest,' said he; adding impatiently, 'Come, show me a light, Madame Cardinal!'

Then, as the glimmer did not shine far enough into the space he wanted to investigate, he snatched the dip out of the neck of a bottle in which Madame Cardinal had stuck it for lack of a candlestick, and, holding it in his fingers, moved it carefully about over every portion of the iron cover he had found within.

'No lock!' said he, after a minute examination. 'There must be a secret spring.'

'What a cunning villain he is, the old hunk!' said Madame Cardinal, while Cérezet's bony fingers poked and punched every spot.

'Aha! I have it!' he exclaimed, after feeling about for more than half an hour, during which Madame Cardinal's life seemed to be suspended.

Under Cérezet's pressure the iron lid sprang open. Inside the wall, among a heap of gold pieces tossed loosely into a fairly large space thus thrown open, a red morocco jewel-case was seen, which by its dimensions promised splendid booty.

'I will take the diamonds for the marriage portion,' said Cérezet, when he saw the magnificent set contained in the case. 'You, mother, would not be able to dispose of them. I leave you the gold for your share. As to the consols and the house, they are not worth the worry of getting the old fellow to make a fresh will.'

'Stop a minute, my boy!' said the woman, who thought this division rather too summary. 'We will count the coin first.'

'Hark!' said Cérezet, pausing to listen.

'What?' asked she.

'Did you not hear some one moving below?'

'No; I heard nothing.'

Céritet signed to her to be silent, and listened more attentively.

'I hear steps on the stairs,' he said a minute after; and he hastily replaced the jewel-case in the iron chest, which he vainly tried to close.

While he was ineffectually struggling with it, the steps came nearer.

'Yes, indeed; some one is coming!' gasped Madame Cardinal in terror. Then, clutching at a straw, she added, 'Pooh! I dare say it is the mad girl. They say she often wanders round at night.'

If so, the crazy woman had a key to fit the door, for a moment later it was turned in the lock. Madame Cardinal hastily measured the distance between herself and the door; had she time to push the bolt? But calculating that she had not, she blew out the candle to give herself the chance of darkness.

A vain precaution! The spoil-sport who came in had a candle in his hand. As soon as she saw that the enemy was a little, frail-looking old man, Madame Cardinal, with flashing eyes, flew to meet the visitor like a lioness about to be robbed of her cubs.

'Compose yourself, my good woman,' said the old man, with sarcastic coolness. 'I have sent for the police; they will be here in a minute.'

At the word police, you might have knocked Madame Cardinal down with a feather, as the saying goes.

'Why, Sir? the police!' she gasped. 'We are not thieves.'

'I would not wait for them, all the same, if I were you,' said the old man. 'They sometimes make awkward mistakes.'

'I may slope, then?' said she incredulously.

'Yes; as soon as you have handed over to me anything you may by chance have slipped into your pockets.'

'Indeed, my good sir, I have nothing in my hands,

nothing in my pockets. I want to harm nobody ; what I came for was only to nurse this poor innocent uncle of mine — search me if you like.'

'Well, be off then, all right,' said the little old man.

Madame Cardinal did not wait to be told twice ; she made off down the stairs.

Céritet seemed inclined to follow in her wake.

'As for you, Monsieur, it is another matter,' said the stranger. 'We shall have something to say to each other. However, if you prove manageable, everything may be satisfactorily settled.'

Whether the effect of the drug was exhausted, or the commotion going on close to him had roused Toupillier, he now opened his eyes, looked about him as if he did not quite know where he was, and then, seeing his precious cupboard open, his excitement gave him strength to shout in a voice that might have roused the whole house : 'Thieves ! Thieves !'

'No, Toupillier, you are not robbed,' said the little old man. 'I came up in time, and nothing is touched.'

'And are you not going to have that villain arrested ?' cried Toupillier, pointing to Céritet.

'The gentleman is not a thief,' replied the old man. 'On the contrary, he is a friend of mine come up with me to lend me support.'

Then, turning to Céritet, he went on in a lower tone : 'I believe, my dear fellow, that we had better put off the few words I have to say to you till to-morrow at ten — at Monsieur du Portail's, the house adjoining this. After what has taken place this night, I may tell you that it will be awkward for you if you should fail to keep the appointment. I should inevitably find you again ; for I have the honour to know who you are — you are the man whom the opposition newspapers at one time called *Céritet the brave*.'

In spite of the ironical point of this reminiscence, Céritet,

perceiving that he would be no more severely dealt with than Madame Cardinal, was only too glad to foresee such a termination, and, promising to be punctual, he made his escape.

Cérizet did not fail to be punctually on the spot as he had been directed.

He was examined through a wicket, and then, on giving his name, was admitted to the house and conducted to du Portail's study, where the old man was writing.

Without rising, and merely nodding to his visitor to be seated, the old man finished a letter. After closing it, and sealing it with such care and accuracy as showed him to be either excessively precise and fastidious, or else a man who had held some diplomatic post, du Portail rang for Bruno, his man-servant, and, giving him the letter, desired him to take it to the Justice of the Peace for the district.

He elaborately wiped the steel pen he had been using, rearranged everything symmetrically on his table, and it was not till all these fidgety little matters had been attended to that he addressed Cérizet, saying : —

‘ You know that poor Monsieur Toupillier died in the night ? ’

‘ No, indeed,’ said Cérizet, assuming the most sympathetic air he could command. ‘ You, Monsieur, give me the first tidings.’

‘ You might at least have expected it. When a dying man is dosed with a large cupful of hot wine which has been drugged into the bargain — since Madame Perrache, after drinking a wine-glassful, has lain in an almost lethargic sleep all night — it is clear that arrangements have been made to hasten the catastrophe.’

‘ I cannot know, Monsieur, what Madame Cardinal may have given to her uncle,’ said Cérizet, with dignity. ‘ I was rash enough, I confess, to help the woman in her care

and interest to preserve the property to which, as she told me, she had undoubted right. But as to attempting the old man's life, I am incapable of such a thing; nothing of the sort ever entered my thoughts.'

'Was it you who wrote me this letter?' said du Portail, point-blank, and taking from under a Bohemian glass paper-weight a note, which he showed to the money-lender,

'That letter?' said Cérizet, with the hesitation of a man who doubts whether he had better deny or confess.

'I am sure of the fact,' du Portail went on. 'I happen to have a mania for autographs. I have one of yours, picked up at the time when the opposition had bestowed on you the glory of martyrdom. I have compared the writing, and it is you, beyond a doubt, who yesterday, in this note, informed me of the pecuniary straits in which young la Peyrade just now finds himself.'

'Knowing that you had in your care a young lady named la Peyrade,' said the money-lender, 'who is probably Théodore's cousin, I suspected that you might be the unknown protector from whom, on more than one occasion, my friend has received the most liberal assistance. As I have a great affection for the poor boy, in his interest I made so bold—'

'You did very right,' said du Portail. 'I am delighted to have met a friend of his. Nor need I conceal from you that last evening it was this very fact that shielded you.—But what is the history of these twenty-five thousand francs' worth of promissory notes? Is he doing badly in business? Does he lead a dissipated life?'

'Far from it,' said Cérizet; 'he is a perfect puritan. He is a man of devout habits, and as an advocate will plead for none but the poorest clients. Also he is about to marry a rich woman.'

'Aha! He is going to be married!—and to whom?'

'There is an idea of his becoming the husband of

Mademoiselle Colleville, daughter of the Secretary to the Mayor of the twelfth Arrondissement. The girl herself has no fortune, but a certain Monsieur Thuillier, her god-father, member of the Municipal Council, has promised to give her a suitable portion.'

'And who is working the matter?'

'La Peyrade has done the Thuilliers great services; he was introduced to them by Monsieur Dutocq, clerk to the justice of the peace for that district.'

'But you say in this letter that the notes of hand were signed in favour of Monsieur Dutocq. Is it a case of matrimonial brokerage?'

'Something of the sort, very probably,' replied Céritet. 'As you know, Monsieur, such transactions are common enough in Paris; the clergy even do not scorn to meddle in them.'

'Then the marriage is almost settled?' said du Portail.

'Why, yes; within the last few days, especially, matters have gone on rapidly.'

'Well, my dear sir, I rely on you to see that it comes to nothing. I have other purposes for Théodore, another match to propose to him.'

'Excuse me,' said Céritet, 'but to hinder his marriage would be to make it impossible for him to pay his debts, and I may respectfully point out to you that these bills are serious matter. Monsieur Dutocq is clerk to the Justice of the Peace, which is as much as to say that it will not be easy to get round him on any point of law and interest.'

'As to Monsieur Dutocq's claims, you must purchase the bills,' said du Portail. 'You and he must settle that between you. At a pinch, and if Théodore should prove refractory to my purpose, those bills, in our hands, will be a valuable weapon. You will make it your business to prosecute in your own name, and you will not be the loser; I will undertake to pay the original sum and the costs.'

‘ You do business handsomely, Sir,’ said Céritet, ‘ it is really a pleasure to work for you. But now if you should think the time had come to inform me more particularly as to the mission you do me the honour to entrust to me — ’

‘ You spoke just now,’ said du Portail, ‘ of Théodore’s cousin, Mademoiselle Lydie de la Peyrade. This young lady — no longer very young, for she is nearly thirty — is the natural daughter of the famous Mademoiselle Beau-mesnil, of the Théâtre-Français, and of la Peyrade, Commissioner-General of the Police under the Empire, and our friend’s uncle. Till the hour of his death, which was sudden, leaving his daughter — whom he had acknowledged and whom he positively worshipped — entirely destitute, I had lived on terms of intimate friendship with that excellent man.’

Céritet, proud to show that he knew something of du Portail’s private life, observed : —

‘ And you, Monsieur, have fulfilled the duties of that friendship to the uttermost, for, by taking the interesting orphan to dwell under your roof, you undertook a difficult charge. Mademoiselle de la Peyrade’s health requires, I have heard, the most patient and tender care.’

‘ Yes,’ said the old man. ‘ At the time of her father’s death the poor child had such a cruel experience that her reason remained impaired ; but a happy change has lately taken place, and no longer ago than yesterday I called a consultation between Doctor Bianchon and the two head physicians of the Salpêtrière. These gentlemen are unanimously agreed that marriage and the birth of a child would certainly cure her ; as you understand, the remedy is too easy and too pleasant not to be tried ? ’

‘ Then it is to Mademoiselle Lydie de la Peyrade that you wish Théodore to be married ? ’ said Céritet.

‘ As you say,’ replied du Portail. ‘ But you must not suppose that, if our young friend should accept this ar-

rangement, I require him to devote himself altogether gratuitously. Lydie is pleasing in person, she is accomplished, she has a charming temper, and will be able to secure for her husband a handsome position in public business. She also has a nice little fortune, consisting partly of what her mother had to leave her; of all I possess — which, as I have no direct heirs, I shall settle on her at her marriage; and, finally, of a pretty considerable sum that has come to her this past night.'

'What!' cried Cérizet, 'did old Toupillier — ?'

'A holograph will — here it is — constitutes her the old beggar's sole legatee. So, as you see, it was handsome on my part to take no further steps in the matter of your attempt last night, for you were intending to rob me of our property.'

'Good Heavens!' said Cérizet, 'I do not think of excusing Madame Cardinal's aberration,' said Cérizet. 'At the same time, as heir-at-law, dispossessed in favour of a stranger, it seems to me that she has some claim to the mercy you were prepared to show her.'

'In that you are mistaken,' replied du Portail, 'and the handsome legacy by which Mademoiselle de la Peyrade seems to have been enriched, is simply a restitution.'

'Restitution?' said Cérizet, puzzled.

'Yes, and nothing is easier to prove. Do you remember a great diamond robbery committed some ten years since by which one of our famous actresses lost her jewels?'

'Certainly,' said Cérizet, 'I was at that time editor of one of my papers and wrote the Paris news myself. Wait a minute — the actress was Mademoiselle Beaumesnil.'

'Exactly so. Mademoiselle Lydie de la Peyrade's mother.'

'And so that wretch Toupillier — No,' added Cérizet, 'I remember the thief was punished. His name was Charles Crochard; and it was whispered, I recollect, that he was the natural son of a great personage, the Comte de Granville, Attorney-General in Paris under the Restoration.'

'Well,' said du Portail, 'this is what happened. The theft, as you will also remember, was committed in a house in the Rue de Tournon where Mademoiselle Beaumesnil lived. Charles Crochard, a handsome young fellow, was on a very intimate footing there, it would seem.'

'Yes, yes,' said Cérizet. 'I recall very vividly the lady's embarrassment when she was called upon to state the facts, and the loss of voice she suffered from when the presiding judge asked her how old she was.'

'The robbery,' said du Portail, 'was boldly committed in broad daylight, and Charles Crochard, having possessed himself of the jewel-case, went to the church of Saint-Sulpice, where he had made an appointment with an accomplice to meet him. As chance would have it, instead of the man he expected, who was a few minutes late, Crochard found himself face to face with a famous member of the detective force whom he perfectly well knew, for the young rascal had fallen into the hands of the law before this. The absence of his assistant and the presence of this man, who, as he fancied, looked at him with suspicion, the disorder of his conscience, and finally a swift turn which, by the merest chance, the detective made towards the door, made the thief suspect that he had been watched.'

'In his panic he lost his head; his first point was to get rid of the jewel-case, which, if found upon him, would prove his guilt. He felt certain he should be captured on leaving the church, imagining it to be surrounded by the police, and, seeing Toupillier in his place near to the holy-water vessel, he went close up to him, and having convinced himself that nobody was watching them, "Here, my good man," said he, "will you take care of this parcel for me? It is a box of lace. I am going to a house close by, to a certain Countess who never pays her bills; instead of giving me my money she is sure to ask to see this, which is something quite new, and to ask me to let her have it on credit. I would rather not have it about me. But whatever you

do," he added, "do not open the paper it is wrapped in, for there is nothing so difficult as to refold a parcel in the old creases."

"What an idiot!" cried Céritet guilelessly. "His instructions were enough to make the man eager to see the contents."

"You are a shrewd philosopher," said du Portail. "An hour later, when Charles Crochard, finding no cause for alarm, came back to fetch the parcel, Toupillier had disappeared. As you may suppose, at early mass next morning Charles Crochard was eager to meet the holy-water server, and found him duly exercising his functions; but night, they say, brings wisdom. The dear man audaciously declared that nothing had been given into his care and that he did not know what Crochard was talking about."

"And of course it was impossible to tackle him and make a commotion," observed Céritet, who was very near sympathising with a trick so neatly done.

"The theft had no doubt already become known," du Portail went on, "and Toupillier, who was a remarkably clever fellow, had, of course, calculated that the thief by accusing him would reveal himself and be obliged to give up his plunder. When the case was tried Charles Crochard never said a word about the way he had been tricked, and when he was sentenced to ten years with hard labour, during all the six years he spent on the hulks — part of the sentence having been remitted — he never opened his lips to a living soul as to the breach of confidence to which he had been a victim."

"I call that pluck!" cried Céritet. The story fired him with admiration; he viewed it from the point of view of the connoisseur and artist.

"During this time," du Portail said, "Madame Beau-mesnil died, leaving her daughter some remnants of a large fortune, and more especially these diamonds, which she especially mentioned, *in the event of their ever being recovered.*"

'Aha!' said Cérizet, 'that spoiled the game for Toupillier; for having such a man as you to deal with—'

'Thinking only of revenge, Charles Crochard's first act on regaining his liberty was to accuse Toupillier as receiver of the stolen jewels. Toupillier was brought to trial, but defended himself with such blunt good-humour that, as there was absolutely no proof against him, the case was dismissed. He nevertheless lost his place by the holy-water vessel in Saint-Sulpice, and only with great difficulty obtained leave to beg at the church door. For my part, I was convinced of his guilt; notwithstanding his dismissal, I had him narrowly watched, but I trusted chiefly to my own vigilance. As a man of independent means and ample leisure, I stuck close to my man and made it the business of my life to unmask him.'

'At that time he was living in the Rue du Cœur-Volant; I contrived to rent a room adjoining his, and one night, through a hole patiently made with a gimlet in the partition between, I saw him take the jewel-case out of a very ingeniously contrived hiding-place and spend nearly an hour in gazing with rapture at the diamonds, which he moved about to catch the play of light, and pressed passionately to his lips. The man loved them for themselves, and had never thought of making money of them.'

'I quite understand,' said Cérizet. 'A monomaniac, like Cardillac the jeweller, about whom a melodrama was written.'

'Just the very same thing,' said du Portail. 'The wretched man was in love with the jewels; indeed, when I called upon him shortly after and gave him to understand that I knew everything, that he might not be deprived of what he called the comfort of his life he implored me to leave him in possession of them for life, pledging himself in return to leave everything he had to Mademoiselle de la Peyrade. He at the same time told me that he owned a

considerable sum in gold, to which he was adding every day, besides a small freehold and money in the funds.'

'If he meant to act honestly,' said Cérizet, 'the bargain was a good one. The interest of the capital sunk in the set of diamonds was quite made up by the other items.'

'Well, as you have seen, my good fellow, I was not ill-judged in trusting him. However, I took sound precautions. I insisted on his taking a room in the house I lived in, so that I could watch him closely; the hiding-place of which you so ingeniously discovered the secret was contrived under my directions,—but what you do not know is that the secret spring, as it opens the iron chest, at the same time rings a loud bell in my room, to warn me of any attempt at robbery that may endanger our hoard.'

'Poor Madame Cardinal,' said Cérizet, with a laugh, 'what a sell for her!'

'This, then, is the present situation,' said du Portail. 'The interest I feel in my old friend's nephew, apart from the relationship which makes me think the alliance suitable, has led me to wish that Théodore should marry his cousin and her fortune. But as the young lady's mental condition might possibly make la Peyrade averse to my views, I have thought it as well not to propose the match to him myself. You crossed my path; I know you to be clever, crafty, and it at once occurred to me to place this little matrimonial negotiation in your hands.'

'Now, understand clearly, you must speak of a young lady of wealth who suffers indeed from a drawback, but who has a makeweight—a nice little fortune. Name no one, and come to me at once to report how the idea has been received.'

'Your confidence,' said Cérizet, 'is a pleasure and an honour to me, and I will do my best to justify it.'

'You must be under no illusion,' said du Portail. 'The first impulse of a man who has another engagement in

view will be to refuse ; but we will not confess ourselves beaten. I do not readily give up a scheme when I believe it to be right, and even if we were to carry our zeal for la Peyrade's happiness so far as to have him imprisoned for debt at Clichy, I am determined not to be defeated in a project of which the results will, I am certain, show him that I was happily inspired. - So, in any case, take the credit notes off Monsieur Dutocq's hands.'

'At par ?' asked Cérizet.

'Yes, at par, if you can do no better. We need not look too closely at a thousand francs one way or the other. Only, that matter once settled, Monsieur Dutocq must promise us his support, or at least his neutrality. From what you say of the other match, I need not point out to you that we must lose no time in putting the irons in the fire.'

'I have an appointment to meet la Peyrade two days hence,' Cérizet observed. 'We have a little matter to settle. Do not you think that it would be as well to wait till then ? At that meeting I may speak of this match incidentally. In case of his refusing, that, as seems to me, would save our dignity.'

'So be it,' said du Portail ; 'that is not delay. And remember, Monsieur, that if you succeed you will find in me, not the man to call you to account for your rashness in aiding Madame Cardinal, but one under serious obligations and ready to serve you to the utmost ; a man, too, whose influence is wider than may generally be believed.'

After such a kind speech the two men could only part in the best understanding, and equally well satisfied on both sides.

Like the old Turnstile, the *Rocher de Cancale*, whither the scene is now to be transferred, is no more than a memory. A wine-shop with a pewter-plated counter has taken

the place of that *Temple of Taste*, that sanctuary of European fame which had been the great focus of gastronomy all through the Empire and the Restoration.

On the day before that on which they had agreed to meet, la Peyrade had this brief note from Cérizet :—

‘ To-morrow, lease or no lease, at the *Rocher* — half-past six.’

As to Dutocq, Cérizet saw him every day, being his copying-clerk ; he had invited him by word of mouth ; but the attentive reader will note a difference in the hour named to this second guest. ‘ At the *Rocher* — a quarter past six,’ Cérizet had said, so it was clear that he wished to have him to himself for at least a quarter of an hour before la Peyrade should arrive.

The money-lender meant to spend that quarter of an hour in bargaining for the purchase of la Peyrade’s promissory notes ; and he fancied that his offer, made point-blank, without any preparation, would be more cordially accepted. By not giving the holder time to consider the matter he might be induced to sell cheap ; and having once acquired the bills below par, the usurer might consider whether it would be better for him to keep the difference, or to gain credit with du Portail by handing over to him the benefit he might secure. It may be said, indeed, that apart from all subsidiary considerations Cérizet would have tried to get the better of his friend. In him it was instinct, a craving of nature. He had as great a horror of the straight line in business as the admirers of English gardens have in laying out their walks.

Dutocq, who was still in debt for a part of the price of his connection, and obliged to save very closely, lived so frugally that a dinner at the *Rocher de Cancale* was a sort of event in his life. He appeared with the punctuality that showed his interest in the appointment, and at precisely a quarter past six walked into the box at the restaurant where Cérizet awaited him.

‘Oddly enough,’ said he, ‘here we are in exactly the same conditions as when we first took up this business of la Peyrade’s ; only the spot for the meeting of the three emperors is somewhat better chosen. I prefer the Tilsit of the Rue Montorgueil to the Tilsit of the Rue de l’Ancienne-Comédie and Pinson’s wretched eating-house.’

‘On my word,’ replied Céritet, ‘I hardly know whether the results justify the change ; for where, when all is done, are the profits from the formation of that triumvirate ?’

‘Well, it was a conditional agreement,’ said Dutocq, ‘and we cannot complain that la Peyrade has lost time in achieving his establishment at the *Thuilleries*, if I may be allowed to pun. The rascal has gone ahead, you must admit.’

‘Not so fast,’ said Céritet, ‘but that his marriage is at this moment a very doubtful matter.’

‘Doubtful ? How ?’

‘Yes. I have been instructed to propose another match to him, to bolster him up ; and I very much doubt whether he will have any choice offered him.’

‘But the devil’s in it, man ; can you think of lending a hand to promote this second match, when we have a mortgage on the first ?’

‘My good friend, we cannot always control circumstances. I plainly saw that under those that have been laid before me the marriage we had planned is simply swept down stream. So then I looked to see what could be saved from the wreck.’

‘Bless me ! Are they fighting for this boy, Théodore ? Who is the girl ? Has she a fortune ?’

‘A very presentable dowry ; quite as good as Mademoiselle Colleville’s.’

‘Then she may go hang. La Peyrade backed the notes, and he shall pay.’

‘He shall pay — indeed ! That is the question. You are not in business, nor is Théodore. It might occur to

him to repudiate the paper. Who can tell whether the Court, when informed as to their origin, seeing that the Thuillier match is broken off, may not quash them as drawn without value received? I can snap my fingers at such a discussion; it cannot affect me; besides, I have taken precautions. But you, as clerk to a justice of the peace, would surely after such an action have differences to settle with the Chancellor's office.'

'Indeed, my good fellow,' said Dutocq, with the temper of a man who finds himself confronted with an argument for which he has no answer, 'you really have a mania for meddling in things —'

'I have told you,' said Céritet, 'that this affair came to me, and I saw so clearly from the first that there was no chance of making fight against the evil influence which threatens us, that I made up my mind to save myself by a sacrifice.'

'What kind of sacrifice?'

'Well, I sold my notes of hand, and left it to the purchaser to fight it out with our friend, the advocate.'

'And who took them of you?'

'Who do you suppose would put himself into my shoes, but some one who had an interest in the other marriage, so as to be able to coerce Master Théodore, by curtailing his liberty, if necessary.'

'Ah, then they really require the bills I hold?'

'Certainly. However, I would not deal till I had consulted you.'

'Well, and what is the bid?'

'What I was willing to take for mine. Knowing better than you how dangerous their rivalry would be, I agreed to take ready money at a bad discount.'

'But what are the terms, come?'

'I parted with them for fifteen thousand.'

'Don't tell me,' said Dutocq, with a shrug. 'Presumably you see your way to recovering the difference on the

brokerage ; and the whole thing, after all, may be a got-up business between you and la Peyrade.'

' You do not mince your words, my good friend. A rascally idea enters your head, and you blurt it out with beautiful candour ! But fortunately you will presently hear me make the proposal to Théodore, and you can judge by his demeanour how far we are in collusion.'

' Well, well,' said Dutocq, ' I withdraw the insinuation. But really your principals are perfect corsairs. A man is not to be bled so desperately ; and besides I have not, as you have, a premium to look forward to.'

' That, my poor friend, is just what I argued. I said to myself : Poor Dutocq is dreadfully hampered for money to pay off the last debt on his office ; here he has a chance of clearing it off at one stroke. — The event proves how risky it would be to compromise la Peyrade ; we offer you cash in hand and on the nail ; it is not, after all, such a bad bargain.'

' Very true — but to lose two-fifths ! '

' Look here,' said Cérizet, ' you spoke just now of a premium. I see a way by which you may secure one ; if you will undertake to fight tooth and nail against the Colleville match, and take the opposite side from that on which you have hitherto stood, I do not despair of getting you the round sum of twenty thousand francs.'

' Then you evidently think that la Peyrade will not take kindly to this new scheme ? that he will kick ? Pray, is the heiress in question a damsel from whom he has already taken something on account ? '

' All I can tell you is that we expect a tough pull before we get him round.'

' I am ready and willing to pull on your side and annoy la Peyrade ; but five thousand francs ! think of it — that is too much to give up.'

At this moment the door of the box was opened and the waiter announced the expected guest.

'You can bring dinner,' said Cérizet, 'I expect no one else.'

It was evident that Théodore was trying his flight to upper social spheres; he constantly gave his mind to the decoration of his person. He was in evening dress, a tail-coat and patent leather shoes, while the other two men received him in morning dress, with muddy boots.

'I am afraid, *Messeigneurs*, that I am a little late,' said he. 'But that infernal Thuillier, with the pamphlet I am correcting for him, is the most intolerable nuisance. I unfortunately agreed that we should correct the proofs together, and we have a fight over every paragraph. "What I don't understand," says he, "the public won't understand," and I have to stand out for every word.'

'What do you expect, my dear boy,' said Dutocq; 'when a man wants to get on he must have courage enough for some sacrifices. When once you are married you can hold up your head.'

'Yes, indeed!' said la Peyrade, 'I shall, I hope; for since the time when you first made me eat this bread of bitterness, I have become very tired of it.'

'Cérizet is going to give us some better food,' said Dutocq.

At first they devoted themselves wholly to doing justice to the bill of fare ordered by Cérizet — the first tenant and to reminiscences of better days. As always happens at these business dinners, when each one is thinking of the matters to be discussed, and yet avoids speaking of them for fear of losing some advantage by seeming too eager, the conversation for some time was on general subjects; and it was not till dessert was served that Cérizet made up his mind to ask Théodore what had been decided on with regard to his lease.

'Nothing, my dear fellow,' said la Peyrade.

'Nothing — how is that? I gave you ample time to come to some conclusion.'

‘And some conclusion has, in fact, been arrived at: there is to be no first tenant. Mademoiselle Brigitte herself will sublet.’

‘That is another thing,’ said Cérezet, with stern reserve. ‘After your promises to me, I own I was far from expecting such a result.’

‘How can I help it, my good friend! I promised, barring contingencies; it was not in my power to alter matters. Mademoiselle Thuillier, as a masterful woman and a living instance of perpetual motion, made up her mind that she could manage the business of the house, and put into her own pocket the profit you hoped to make. In vain did I represent to her all the worry and anxiety she was bringing on herself.

“Pooh, nonsense!” said she, “it will keep my blood stirring and be very good for my health.””

‘But it is terrible!’ said Cérezet. ‘The poor woman will not know which way to turn; she has no idea of what it is to have an empty house on her hands to be filled with tenants from top to bottom.’

‘I urged all those arguments,’ said Théodorese, ‘but I did not begin to change her mind. There you are, my worthy democrats; you fomented the Revolution of ’89; you flattered yourselves that it was a capital speculation to dethrone the nobility in favour of the middle class, and now you are simply turned out of doors. It may sound like a paradox, but it was not really the yokel who could be taxed and worked to the bone, it was the aristocrat. The aristocracy, to preserve their dignity by prohibiting themselves a vast number of vulgar details, even that of learning to write, found themselves dependent, in fact, on the crowd of servants whom they necessarily had recourse to, and were compelled to trust for three-fourths of their daily actions. Those were the golden days of the intendants, or stewards — the crafty and wide-awake factors through whose hands all the interests of the great families had to

pass, and who, though they may not have deserved the odious reputation they earned, by the force of circumstances grew fat on the mere parings of the vast fortunes they had to deal with. Nowadays we have no end of practical aphorisms. "If you want a thing well done, do it yourself. There is nothing disgraceful in knowing your own business," and a thousand other humdrum axioms which, by making every man a man of business, have suppressed the middleman.

'How can you expect that Mademoiselle Brigitte Thuillier should not try to manage her house when dukes and peers go themselves to the Bourse, examine their leases, have every paper read to them before signing, and go to discuss every point with the notary whom they formerly scorned as a scrivener?'

During la Peyrade's harangue Céritet had had time to recover from the blow that had taken his breath away; and, to lead by a transition to the other matter entrusted to his management, he said, with an air of indifference:—

'All your remarks, my dear boy, are exceedingly clever; but the thing which most clearly proves our discomfiture is that you are not on such a footing of personal influence with Mademoiselle Thuillier as you would have us believe. She slips through your fingers when she chooses, so it strikes me that your marriage is far from being such a settled thing as Dutocq and I were willing to think it.'

'No doubt,' said la Peyrade, 'the work we have sketched still needs some finishing touches, but I believe it to be well on towards completion.'

'I, on the contrary, am sure that you have lost ground, and nothing can be more natural; you have just done these people a very great service; that is never forgiven.'

'Well, we shall see,' said Théodore. 'I still hold them by more than one line.'

'No, indeed; you thought you could do wonders by loading them with kindness, and now that they are in-

dependent they will treat you as dirt ; the human heart is made so, especially the heart of the middle classes. It is not only that I myself, in the present instance, feel the blow that is upsetting you ; in your place I should not think I was standing on solid ground, and if some chance were afforded me to turn back — ’

‘ What ! Merely because I have failed in securing the lease for you, am I to throw the handle after the axe ? ’

‘ As I tell you,’ said Cérizet, ‘ I am not viewing the matter from the standpoint of my own interest. But, as I have no doubt whatever that you made every conceivable effort, as my sincere friend, to gain the point, your failure and dismissal are to me a very unsatisfactory symptom. In fact, they lead me to speak of a matter which I should not otherwise have mentioned, since, in my opinion, when a man has an end in view he should go straight on to it without looking in front, or behind, or allowing himself to be directed from it by any other ambition.’

‘ Well, well ! ’ said la Peyrade, ‘ what is all this tall talk about ? What do you want me to do ? And what will it cost ? ’

‘ My dear boy,’ said Cérizet, ignoring his impertinence, ‘ you yourself can judge of the value of such a find as a young lady, well educated, gifted with beauty and talents — and a fortune, at least equal to Céleste’s, of her very own, *plus* fifty thousand francs worth of diamonds, like Mademoiselle George’s in a provincial poster ; besides, what must chiefly attract a man of an ambitious spirit, some influence in political circles for her husband’s benefit.’

‘ And you have this jewel in your pocket ? ’ asked la Peyrade incredulously.

‘ Better still ; I am authorised to make you the offer. I might almost say I am commissioned to do so.’

‘ My good man, you are fooling me, unless this phoenix has some prohibitive defect.’

‘ Ah, I confess,’ said Cérizet, ‘ there is one little draw-

back,— not in the family connection, for, to tell the truth, the lady has none.'

'Oho! a natural child! — and moreover?'

'Moreover, she is not so young as she was; she may be nine and twenty; but nothing can be easier than to picture a maid not yet quite old as a young widow.'

'And that is the worst you have to say?'

'Yes, all that is irremediable.'

'What do you mean by that? A case of rhinoplastics?'

The word as addressed to Cérezet was singularly offensive. In fact, this tone had been very evident in all the lawyer had said during dinner. However, it was not the usurer's game to seem offended.

'No,' said he, 'our nose is as well made as our figure and foot; but we are, I must own, somewhat afflicted with hysteria.'

'I see,' said Théodore, 'and as there is but one step from hysteria to insanity —'

'Just so,' Cérezet eagerly put in. 'Troubles have left our brain slightly affected, but the doctors are unanimously agreed that at the birth of the first child not a sign will remain of this little mental disturbance.'

'The doctors, of course, are infallible!' replied the lawyer, 'but in spite of all your discouragement you must excuse me, my good friend, if I continue to pay my addresses to Mademoiselle Colleville. It seems an absurd confession, but the truth is that I am gradually falling quite in love with the little girl. It is not that her beauty is remarkable, or that the splendour of her fortune has dazzled me; but the girl has an artless soul added to a strong foundation of good sense, and, which settles the question in my mind, there is something very attractive in her sincere and solid piety. I believe she will make her husband happy.'

'Yes,' said Cérezet, who, having been on the stage, remembered Molière's words, "*Your hymen will be soaked in sweets and joys.*"'

This quotation from *Tartuffe* nettled la Peyrade, and he retorted:—

‘The contact of her innocence will purge me of the infection of the low company I have hitherto kept.’

‘And you will pay your notes of hand,’ added Céribet. ‘With as little delay as possible, if you take my advice, for Dutocq, here present, confessed to me but just now that he would not be sorry to see the colour of your money.’

‘I? Never!’ exclaimed Dutocq. ‘On the contrary, our friend is well within the time allowed by law.’

‘Well, I, for my part, am quite of Céribet’s opinion,’ said Théodore. ‘The less a debt is legally due, and the more disputable and discreditable it is, the greater haste to pay and have done with it.’

‘But, my dear la Peyrade,’ said Dutocq, ‘you speak with such bitterness! ’

La Peyrade, taking out his pocket-book, merely said:—

‘Have you the bills with you, Dutocq?’

‘Indeed, my dear boy, I have not,’ said the other, ‘and am the less likely to have them about me because they are now in Céribet’s hands.’

‘Well,’ said the advocate, rising, ‘whenever you like to call, I pay over the counter. Céribet can tell you that.’

‘What, are you off without waiting for coffee?’ said Céribet, utterly amazed.

‘Yes; I have an appointment for eight o’clock in an arbitration case. And we have said all we had to say: You have not got the lease; you have got your twenty-five thousand francs; Dutocq’s are ready for him whenever he chooses to call at my office. I see nothing to hinder me from going where my business calls me, wishing you a very good evening.’

‘Heyday!’ said Céribet, as Théodore went out, ‘this is a rupture.’

‘Aye, and made as emphatic as possible,’ remarked

Dutocq. ‘The air with which he took out his pocket-book!’

‘But where the devil did he find the money?’ asked the money-lender.

‘In the same place, no doubt,’ replied Dutocq ironically, ‘where he found that which he produced to redeem the notes you were obliged to let him have so cheap.’

‘My good friend,’ said Céritet, ‘I will explain the circumstances in which that insolent rogue released himself from me, and you will see if he did not literally rob me of fifteen thousand francs.’

‘That is very likely; but you, my kind agent, wanted to do me out of ten thousand.’

‘No, indeed. I was instructed to purchase your share of the bills; and after all, I had gone as far as ten thousand when our gentleman came in —’

‘At any rate,’ said Dutocq, ‘when we leave I will go to your house and you shall give me his notes of hand; for, as you may suppose, to-morrow morning at the earliest human hour, I shall call at what Monsieur calls his office. I will not give his paying mood time to cool.’

‘And you will be very wise; for, take my word for it, there will be some rough play in his career before long.’

‘Then do you really mean that story of a crazy girl whom he is to marry? I must confess that, in his place, with affairs looking so promising of success, I should not have jumped at the offer. Nina and Ophelia are very interesting on the stage, but in the domestic circle —’

‘In the domestic circle, where they have a comfortable fortune, you are only the guardian,’ said Céritet sapiently, ‘in point of fact, you get the fortune without the wife.’

‘Well,’ said Dutocq, ‘that is one way of looking at it.’

‘If you like, we will get our coffee elsewhere,’ Céritet suggested. ‘This dinner has ended so flatly that I only want to get out of the place — it is very stuffy.’

He called the waiter. ‘The bill,’ said he.

‘M’sieu’, it is paid.’

‘Paid — and by whom?’

‘By the gentleman who went out just now.’

‘But it is inconceivable!’ cried Cérizet. ‘I ordered the dinner, and you allowed a stranger to pay for it.’

‘It is no fault of mine,’ said the waiter; ‘the gentleman paid the lady at the desk. She supposed it was all right, no doubt. It is not so very common to find gentlemen fighting for the pleasure of paying.’

‘Well — all right!’ said Cérizet, dismissing the waiter.

‘No coffee, gentlemen?’ said the man, before he left.  
‘It is paid for.’

‘For that very reason we will not have it!’ said Cérizet irritably. ‘It is really monstrous that in a house of this character such a blunder should be possible. Can you conceive of such insolence?’ he added, when the waiter was gone.

‘Faugh!’ said Dutocq, taking his hat; ‘it is a schoolboy’s trick to show that he has money in his pocket. It is a new sensation, evidently.’

‘No, no,’ said Cérizet, ‘it is not that. It is a way of insisting on the quarrel. “I do not choose to be indebted to you even for a dinner” — that is what it means.’

‘In point of fact, my dear fellow,’ said Dutocq, as they went down the steps, ‘this banquet was intended to celebrate your enthronement as principal tenant. He could not get you the lease; so I can understand that his conscience was ill at ease under the notion of allowing you to pay for a dinner which, like my promissory notes, were for no value received.’

Cérizet made no comment on this ill-natured explanation. They were in front of the desk where the lady presided who had allowed herself to be paid by the wrong man; and the usurer, to save his dignity, felt bound to speak his mind.

The two men then went out together, and the money-

lender took his master to find a cup of coffee in a poor sort of tavern in the Passage du Saumon.

Here the Amphitryon who had got off so cheaply recovered his temper; he was like a fish out of water restored to its element. Sunk as he was to such a level as makes a man ill at ease in places where better company is to be met, it was almost with delight that Cérezet found himself in his element again in this saloon where pool was being noisily played for the benefit of *a hero of the Bastille*.

He had a reputation in this establishment as a billiard-player, and was requested to join in the game already begun. He bought a ball, that is to say, one of the players sold him his turn and his chances. Dutocq took advantage of this arrangement to make himself scarce, going off, as he said, to inquire after a sick friend.

Not long after, just as Cérezet, in his shirt-sleeves and with a pipe between his teeth, had achieved one of those masterly strokes which rouse the gallery to frenzied admiration, on casting an exultant glance behind him he saw a terrible kill-joy.

Among the lookers-on, du Portail was gazing at him over his stick, as it were, on which his chin was propped.

A flush spread over Cérezet's cheeks, and he hesitated to recognise and bow to the gentleman whom he had little expected to meet in such a place. Incapable of making the best of this unpleasant incident, he lost his presence of mind; this affected his play, and a few strokes after he found himself put out.

While he was putting on his coat, feeling very cross, du Portail rose, and pushing by him as he went out, said in an undertone:—

‘Rue Montmartre, at the end of the Passage.’

When they met, Cérezet was so clumsy as to try to explain his being found in such loose attire and in this place.

‘But to see you there I was necessarily there myself,’ said du Portail.

‘That is true,’ said the money-lender, ‘and I was considerably surprised at finding a peaceful resident of the Saint-Sulpice quarter in that den.’

‘Which sufficiently proves,’ said the gentleman, in a voice which stifled curiosity and cut off all explanations, ‘that I am in the habit of going everywhere and anywhere, and that my lucky star can guide me on the track of those whom I want to see. I was thinking of you just as you came in. Well, what have you done?’

‘Nothing of any use,’ said Céritet. ‘After playing me a horribly scurvy trick and keeping me out of a splendid stroke of business, our man rejected all overtures with supreme contempt. There is no hope of buying in Dutocq’s bills; la Peyrade is in funds, it would seem, for he wanted to take them up then and there, and will undoubtedly pay them off to-morrow morning.’

‘Then he regards his marriage to Mademoiselle Colléville as a settled thing?’

‘Not only that, but his latest pretence is to give out that it is a marriage for love. He favoured me with a long speech to convince me that he was sincerely attached to her.’

‘Very good,’ said du Portail, ‘stay the proceedings’ — by which he meant, do nothing further in the matter. ‘I will undertake to bring our gentleman to reason. Come to me to-morrow to give me full particulars as to the family he wants to marry into. You have missed one stroke of business; do not let that worry you; by helping me others will turn up.’

So speaking, he called a hackney coachman who happened to be driving past, got into the cab, and with a friendly but patronising nod to Céritet, told the man to drive to the Rue Honoré-Chevalier.

As he walked down the Rue Montmartre towards the Estrapade quarter, Céritet thrashed his brain to guess who

this little old man could be, with his abrupt speech, his imperious tone, and his manner when he addressed people as of holding them with grappling-irons ; who came, too, so far from home to spend the evening in a place where his distinguished superiority made him appear quite out of his element.

He had got as far as the Halle without hitting on any solution of this problem ; but he was roughly roused from his meditation by a hearty slap on the back.

He hastily turned round, and found himself face to face with Madame Cardinal, not that there was anything to astonish him in meeting her in this neighbourhood, whither she came in the small hours of the morning to lay in her stock in trade.

Since the evening they had spent in the Rue Honoré-Chevalier, in spite of the leniency then extended to her, the good woman had thought it prudent to pay very brief visits to her own lodgings ; and for the last two days had been drowning the sore of her discomfiture in liquor taken ‘ short,’ and called ‘ drops of comfort.’

Her voice was thick and her face on fire as she said, —

‘ Hallo, daddy ! And how did you get on with the little old man ? ’

‘ I explained to him in a very few words,’ said the money-lender, ‘ that, so far as I was concerned, he was under a misapprehension. You, my poor woman, have behaved throughout with unpardonable recklessness. When you asked me to help you in securing your uncle’s property, how was it that you did not know of his having a natural daughter, to whom he long since left all he had by will ? The little old man, who interrupted you in your absurd attempt to anticipate the inheritance, was neither more nor less than the legatee’s guardian.’

‘ Oho ! So that is a guardian ! ’ said the woman. ‘ Well, a pretty sort they are — your guardians ! To talk to a

woman at my time of life — only because she wishes to find out if her uncle has anything to leave — about sending for the police ! If that is not abominable, disgusting !'

'Come, Madame Cardinal,' said Céritet, 'you have nothing to complain of; you got off cheap.'

'And you ? — I should like to know ! You, who picked the locks and wanted to pocket the diamonds under pretence of marrying my daughter ! As if she would even look at you — my daughter ! And a legitimate daughter, she is ! "Never, mother," says she, "never would I give my heart to a man with a nose like that !"'

'Then you have found the girl ?'

'No longer ago than last evening. She has given up her vermin of an actor, and is, I flatter myself, in a splendid position, eating off silver, having her brougham by the month, and highly respected by a lawyer who would marry her out of hand, but that he must wait till his parents die, because his father, as it happens, is a mayor, and such a marriage might displease the government.'

'My good woman, what stuff you are talking. His father is his mother ?'<sup>1</sup>

'Dear me, what next ! Mayor of the district of the eleventh arrondissement, — Monsieur Minard, a retired cocoa merchant, enormously rich.'

'Ah, to be sure, to be sure. I know him. And Olympe, you say, is with his son.'

'That is to say, they do not live together, to avoid scandal, though his intentions are strictly honourable. He lives with his father, and meanwhile they have bought all their furniture, and it is housed, with my daughter, in rooms near the Chaussée d'Antin. A stylish quarter, isn't it ?'

'Why, that seems to me a capital arrangement,' said Céritet, 'and as it is clear that Heaven did not mean us for each other — '

<sup>1</sup> Mère, mother — maire, mayor.

'Yes, that's just where it is. I believe the child will turn out quite a comfort to me; and there is a thing I want to ask your advice about.'

'What is that?' asked Cérizet.

'It is just this: my daughter being in such luck, of course I cannot go on crying fish in the streets, and since I am disinherited by that uncle of mine, don't you think I have a right to ask for an allowance for Clement?'

'You are dreaming, my good woman; your daughter is under age; it is you who ought to be keeping her, and not she who ought to allow you aliment.'

'And so those who have not, are to give to those who have!' exclaimed Madame Cardinal, her temper rising. 'A pretty thing is the law — as well as your guardians, who talk of sending for the police for a mere nothing. All right! Let him fetch the police! Let him have me executed! That will not hinder me from saying that rich men are all thieves, and the poor people ought to make another revolution to get their rights, which you, my boy, and my daughter, and her lawyer Minard, and the little guardian, will have to knock under, d'ye see?'

Seeing that his ex-step-mother had reached a really incoherent pitch of excitement, Cérizet abruptly left her, and when he was fifty paces away he could hear himself still pursued by abuse which he promised himself he would pay her out for, the very next time she should come to the bank, in the Rue des Poules, to ask him to make things easy for her.

As he got near the house, Cérizet, who was anything rather than brave, had a shock; he perceived a figure in ambush by the door — a man, who, on his approach, moved out and was evidently coming to meet him.

Happily it was only Dutocq; he had come for la Peyrade's notes of hand. Cérizet handed them over to him with some ill-humour, complaining of the distrust implied in a visit at such an unseemly hour.

Dutocq cared little enough for his touchiness, and early next morning he called on la Peyrade.

Théodore paid him on the nail, and to some effusive speeches which Dutocq was tempted to make when he felt the cash in his pocket, he replied with marked coldness. Everything in his demeanour betrayed the attitude of a slave who has just broken his chains, and who does not care to make any particularly Christian use of his freedom.

As he let his late creditor out, Dutocq found himself confronting a woman dressed like a servant, who was about to ring the bell. She was, as it would seem, an acquaintance of Dutocq's, for he said to her :—

‘ So-ho, mother, you feel a craving to consult a lawyer, heh ? You are quite wise. At the family council some very serious stories were told about you.’

‘ Heh ! Thank God, I am afraid of no one, and I can hold up my head and march on,’ replied the woman thus addressed.

‘ So much the better ! ’ said the law clerk, ‘ so much the better. But you will probably be summoned, ere long, to account for this business before the judge. But after all you are in good hands, and our friend la Peyrade can give you the best advice.’

‘ Sir, you are quite mistaken,’ replied the woman ; ‘ it was not on account of what you fancy that I came to consult monsieur the lawyer.’

‘ Well, well, take care of yourself, my good woman, for I warn you that you will be plucked in style. The relations are furious with you, and they will stick to the notion that you are very rich.’

As he spoke, Dutocq fixed an eye on Théodore, who avoided his gaze and desired his client to step in.

This was what had taken place, the day before, between this woman and la Peyrade.

La Peyrade, it may be remembered, was in the habit

of going, every morning, to early mass in his parish church. For some time past he had found himself the object of curious attention on the part of the woman who had just now entered his room; like Dorine in *Tartuffe*, she had been careful to attend regularly *at his exact hour*, and these proceedings had puzzled him greatly.

An unspoken passion? Such an explanation was incompatible with the mature age and pragmatical devotion of the woman who, wearing the close-fitting cap, *à la Janséniste*, by which a few ardent votaries of the sect may still be identified in the Saint-Jacques quarter, covered up all her hair like a nun; while, on the other hand, her clothes were almost fastidiously neat; and a gold cross, hanging round her neck from a black velvet ribbon excluded the hypothesis of timid poverty anxious to delay the moment when it must boldly stand confessed.

On the morning of the day when the dinner was to be given at the Rocher de Cancale, la Peyrade, tired of these manœuvres which were at last beginning to occupy his thoughts, and perceiving that this puzzle in a close cap seemed anxious to speak to him, had gone up to the woman and asked if there were anything he could do for her.

‘I believe, Sir, that you are the famous Monsieur de la Peyrade, the advocate of the poor?’

‘My name is la Peyrade, and I have, in fact, had the opportunity of helping some of the poorer people of this quarter.’

This was the Provençal’s modest version of the matter—not, at that moment, too excessively a Southerner.

‘If, Sir, you would of your kindness listen, and advise me.’

‘The place,’ said Théodore, ‘is not very well chosen for such a consultation. What you have to say is important, it would seem, for I have noticed you moving about me for some little time; I live close by, Rue Saint-Dominique-d’Enfer, and if you will take the trouble to come to my rooms—’

'I shall not trouble you too much, Sir ?'

'Not at all ; it is my business to attend to my clients.'

'At what hour, not to put you to any inconvenience, Sir ?'

'When you please ; I shall be at home all the morning.'

'Then I will attend mass again and take communion ; I should not have dared to do so at this service, the idea of speaking to you, Sir, would have distracted my mind. When I have performed my devotions, I can be at your rooms by about eight, if that suits you, Sir.'

'Perfectly ; and you need not make so much ceremony over it,' said la Peyrade impatiently.

This touch of irritation may, perhaps, have arisen from a little professional jealousy, for it struck him that he had to deal with a practised hand, who could give him points.

At the appointed hour, not a minute before or after, the bigot rang the lawyer's bell, and he, after persuading her, with some difficulty, to sit down, desired her to speak.

The good woman was then afflicted with the little postponing cough that comes in to secure a short delay when approaching a difficult subject. Finally, making up her mind to the plunge, she explained the object of her visit.

'I came,' said she, 'to ask you, Sir, to be so good as to tell whether it is true that a very charitable man, now dead, left a fund for rewarding servants who have done well by their masters ?'

'That is to say,' replied la Peyrade, 'Monsieur de Monthyon founded a set of prizes which have, in fact, been frequently given to zealous and exemplary servants. But mere good conduct is not enough to earn one of these rewards ; some act of heroic devotion must be proved, of truly Christian self-sacrifice.'

'Religion,' said the bigot, 'enjoins humility, and I certainly should not dare to praise myself ; but for more than twenty years I have lived in the service of an old man, dull beyond all you can fancy, who has spent all he has on

inventing things, and whom I am obliged to maintain — and there are persons who think I am not altogether unworthy to obtain the prize.'

'It is, no doubt, from among such cases that the Academy selects the candidates,' said la Peyrade. 'What is your master's name?'

'Monsieur Picot; old Father Picot he is always called in the neighbourhood; he walks about dressed like a guy at carnival-time, and all the children troop at his heels, crying after him: "Good-day, Daddy Picot." — But that is the man all over; he never cares what folks think of him; he is always wool-gathering. What is the good of my wearing myself to the bone to cook him something tasty? If you asked him what he had for dinner he could not tell you. — A clever man, too, who has turned out some good pupils; perhaps, Sir, you know young Phellion, a professor at the Saint-Louis school, who still comes pretty frequently to our house.'

'Then your master is a mathematician?' said la Peyrade.

'Yes, Sir; and mathematics have been his ruin. He has taken up some queer ideas, in which it would seem there is no sense at all, after ruining his eyesight at the Observatory, near by, where he was employed for a good many years.'

'Well,' said la Peyrade, 'you must get some testimonials to prove all your devotion to the old man, and I will then draw you up a form of application, and take the preliminary steps.'

'How kind you are!' cried the woman, clasping her hands. 'But if you would allow me — there is a little difficulty —'

'And what is that?'

'I have been told, Sir, that to get a prize you must be very poor indeed.'

'Well, not quite a pauper; at the same time the Academy endeavours, no doubt, to help those who are in poor cir-

cumstances, and who have made sacrifices really beyond their means.'

'As for sacrifices, I may flatter myself I have made enough, when the whole of a little fortune I had from my parents has been spent in the housekeeping; and for more than fifteen years I have never had a penny of my wages, which, at three hundred francs a year, with the compound interest, mounts up to a nice little sum, as you will allow, Sir.'

At the words 'compound interest,' which presupposed some financial experience, la Peyrade looked more closely at this Antigone.

'Then the difficulty in question — ?' said he.

'You will not regard it as an objection, I hope, Sir, that I should have lately lost a very rich uncle, who died in England, and who, after doing nothing for his family during his lifetime, left me by will the sum of twenty-five thousand francs.'

'Of course,' said la Peyrade, 'nothing can be more natural or more perfectly legitimate.'

'And yet, Sir, I have been told that it might do me a mischief in the opinion of the judges.'

'That, no doubt, is possible, because, as you now are in easy circumstances, the devotion you still propose to show to your master, as I suppose, will be evidently less meritorious.'

'I certainly will never desert the good man, in spite of his faults, although the poor little property I have come in for will be in the greatest peril.'

'How so?' asked la Peyrade, who was curious.

'Bless me, Sir, if he thinks I have any money, if it is but a mouthful, it will all be swamped in his inventions for perpetual motion, which have been his ruin, and mine too.'

'Then, as I understand,' said la Peyrade, 'what you wish is that this legacy should remain a secret both from the Academy and from your master?'

'You are so clever, Sir; you understand so well!' said the pious dame, smiling.

'And to that end,' the lawyer went on, 'you do not wish to keep the money in your own hands?'

'That my master may find it and grab it!—Besides, as you may believe, I should be glad, if only to enable me to get him some little extra treats, that the money should bring in some interest.'

'And the more the better,' observed la Peyrade.

'Well, Sir, say five to six per cent.'

'Then it would appear that what you want my advice on is not only a memorial to apply for a prize for virtue, but also a sound investment?'

'You are so kind, Sir, so charitable, so encouraging!'

'The form of application, after making some inquiry, will not be difficult; but an investment affording good security, and at the same time kept absolutely secret, is far less easy to manage.'

'But if I dared—' said she.

'What?' said la Peyrade.

'You understand me, Sir?'

'I?—not in the least.'

'I prayed to Heaven but just now that you might yourself take charge of the money. I should feel so confident that it was in safe hands, and that nothing would be said about it.'

At this moment la Peyrade was reaping the reward of the farce he had played of devotion to the poorer class. Nothing could have inspired this woman with the boundless confidence she felt in him, unless it were the chorus of praise from all the porters' wives in the neighbourhood. The thought of Dutocq flashed on him, and he felt ready to believe that this woman had been sent to him by Providence. But the more he longed to take advantage of such a chance of purchasing freedom, the more it behooved him to seem to yield against his will; and he made endless difficulties.

In point of fact he had no great belief in his client's character, and he was not anxious, in robbing Peter to pay Paul, as the saying goes, to throw over a creditor who, after all, was in the same boat with him, in favour of an old woman who might become troublesome at any moment, and, in her eagerness to recover her money, might make such a fuss as would seriously damage his reputation. He determined, therefore, to play a desperate game.

'My good woman,' said he, 'I am in no want of money, and I am not rich enough to pay you the interest on a sum of twenty-five thousand francs without investing it. The only thing I can do is to put it, in my own name, in the hands of a notary, Monsieur Dupuis, a pious man whom you may see any Sunday on the official bench in the parish church. Notaries, as you know, give no form of receipt; I shall therefore give you none. I can only pledge myself to leave among my papers, in case of my death, a note that will secure you the repayment of your capital. As you see, it is a matter of blind confidence — and even so, I take the money most unwillingly and merely to oblige a person who commends herself so strongly to my good-will by her pious sentiments, and by the charitable use she proposes to make of her little fortune.'

'If you see no other way, Sir — '

'This is the only plan that seems to me possible,' replied la Peyrade. 'However, I do not despair of getting you six per cent, and at any rate you may be certain that it will be punctually paid. Only it might happen that the notary could not command the capital under six or twelve months' notice, because the moneys which notaries usually invest in mortgages are commonly tied up for a longer or shorter term. Also, as soon as you have gained the prize for virtue, which in all probability I can enable you to get, as you then may no longer care to conceal your little fortune — though I quite understand your wishing to do at present — I must warn you that in case of any indiscretion on your

part the capital will be immediately returned to you, and I shall not hesitate to tell the world at large how you have concealed this legacy from the master to whom you profess such entire devotion. This, as you must see, will reveal you as a hypocrite, and detract greatly from your reputation for piety.'

'Oh, sir,' said the woman, 'can you suppose I would tell anything I ought to hold my tongue about?'

'Bless me, my good woman, in business we must provide against every contingency. Money makes quarrels between the best friends, and leads to the most unforeseen issues. So take time and think it over; come again a few days hence. Between this and then you may have thought of some plan that you like better, and I myself, though proposing so recklessly an arrangement which I confess does not please me, may have discerned difficulties which escape me at the present moment.'

This threat, hinted at in conclusion, was certain to clinch the matter.

'I have thought it all over,' said the woman. 'With so religious a man as you, sir, there can be no risk.'

She took a small pocket-book out of the bosom of her dress and extracted twenty-five thousand-franc bank-notes.

The dexterity with which she counted them was a revelation to la Peyrade. The woman was evidently used to fingering money, and a queer notion flashed through his brain — 'Supposing I were receiving stolen goods!'

'No, no,' he said. 'In order to draw up the petition to be presented to the Academy, I must first, as I told you, make some little inquiry, so I shall be calling on you in the natural course of things by and by. At what hour are you alone?'

'My master goes out at about four to take a turn in the Luxembourg.'

'And where do you live?'

'Rue du Val-de-Grace, No. 9.'

'Very well, at four o'clock then; and if—as I see no reason to doubt—my information is satisfactory, I will then take your money. Otherwise, as we can take no further steps in the matter of the prize you will not need to make any mystery of your legacy. Then you can invest it in a more ordinary manner than I have been obliged to suggest to you.'

'Oh, you are very cautious, Sir,' said the woman, who had fancied the business settled. 'I did not steal the money, thank the Lord! And you can make every inquiry you wish among the neighbours.'

'That is just what I must do, whether or no,' said la Peyrade dryly, for he did not altogether like this alert shrewdness, which, under an assumption of artlessness, read all his thoughts. 'Prizes for virtue are not given for the asking, and short of being a thief you may not be a Sister of Charity; there is a wide interval between the two extremes.'

'As you please, Sir,' said the woman. 'You are doing me too great a service for me to make any demur to your precautions.' And with a most unctuous curtsey she departed, taking her money with her.

'The devil!' thought la Peyrade, 'that woman is more than a match for me. She swallows an affront with an air of gratitude and never a wry face. I have not learnt to control myself so effectually.' He was half afraid that he had been too cautious, and that his client might change her mind before he paid her the call he had promised.

However, the mischief was done, and though a little worried at the thought of having perhaps missed an opportunity, he would sooner have lost a limb than yield to the temptation to call a minute earlier than the hour he had fixed.

The information he picked up in the neighbourhood was contradictory; some spoke of his client as a perfect saint, others thought her a very cunning hussy; still, there was nothing on the whole against her moral conduct, or calcu-

lated to scare la Peyrade away from the piece of good luck she had put in his way.

When he saw her again at four o'clock she was still in the same mind.

It was with this money in his pocket that he went to the *Rocher de Cancale*; perhaps the various excitement through which he had passed in the course of the day had something to do with the abrupt and hasty way of his rupture with his associates. This manner of behaviour was very ill-judged, and not the outcome of either his natural or his acquired temperament. In fact, the money, all hot, that he had in his pocket, had a little turned his brain, and the mere touch of it had filled him with an eager impatience for freedom which was beyond his control. He had thrown Céribet overboard without even consulting Brigitte; and yet he had not all the courage of his treachery, since he had ascribed to the old maid a purpose which was the offspring solely of his own ill-will, and his bitter memories of entanglements with the man who so long had him in his power.

Thus all through the day la Peyrade had come short of being the infallible and ever-ready man we have hitherto found him. Once already, when holding the fifteen thousand francs given to him by Thuillier, he had been dragged by Céribet into an illegal action which had compelled him to the master-stroke of his bargain with Sauvaignou.

It is, no doubt, more difficult to keep a level head in good than in bad fortune.

The Farnese Hercules, strong in quiescence, shows more fully the reserve of muscular force than other figures of Hercules in violent action, represented in all the excitement of their labours.

## PART II

BETWEEN the two parts of this narrative, a great event had occurred in the Phellions' life.

Everybody has heard of the disaster of the Odéon, the ill-starred theatre which for so many years devoured its managers. Rightly or wrongly, the residents in the neighbourhood of this dramatic failure are convinced that they take the greatest interest in its prosperity, and more than once the Mayor and the big-wigs of the arrondissement have endeavoured, with a courage that does them honour, to promote various schemes for galvanising the corpse.

Now, to have a finger in some theatrical pie is one of the perennial ambitions of the middle-class man; hence the would-be saviours of the Odéon, one after another, thought themselves magnificently repaid when they were allowed the semblance of a vote in the management of the concern.

It was as a member of a board of this kind that Minard, as Mayor of the eleventh arrondissement, was appointed president of the Reading Committee, with liberty to select as assessors a certain number of notables of the Quartier Latin.

The reader will ere long be fully informed as to the point reached by la Peyrade in his attempts on Céleste's fortune. It may at once be said that as his schemes advanced towards maturity they had inevitably been talked about; and since at this stage they apparently excluded the pretensions alike of the younger Minard and of Félix the professor, the prejudice which Minard senior had allowed himself to betray against the elder Phellion had been converted into an unequivocal disposition to friendly overtures, for nothing binds and subdues men more effectually than the sense of a common repulse.

Thus seen by eyes unblinded by paternal rivalry, Phel-

lion was to Minard as a noble Roman of unimpeachable integrity, a man whose little books had been adopted by the University — that is to say a healthy and well-tested mind.

So when it was the Mayor's duty to form a committee for the dramatic custom-house of which he was the head, he immediately chose Phellion; and this noble citizen, on the day when a seat was offered him on that august tribunal, felt as though a fillet of gold crowned his brow. It may well be believed, not lightly nor unadvisedly had so pompous a mortal as Phellion accepted the high and sacred functions proposed to him. He was called, he told himself, to exercise a magistracy, a priesthood.

'To form an opinion of men,' said he to Minard, who was surprised at his hesitancy, 'is an alarming task; but to judge intellects! Who may conceive himself equal to such a task?'

And, once more, family considerations, that rock ahead of all brave resolve, had encroached on the rights of conscience; the thoughts of the boxes and admissions which would be at the disposal of a member of the board, had given rise to such a commotion in the household, that for a moment his free option had seemed to be in danger. Happily, however, Brutus thought himself justified in deciding on the line of action towards which the consensus of the whole tribe of Phellion was urging him; from the observations made by his son-in-law Barniol, as well as from his personal judgment, he saw reason to believe that by his vote, always to be recorded in favour of works of irreproachable morality, and by his firm determination always to oppose any drama to which a mother might hesitate to take her daughter, he would be enabled to do the most signal service to good principles and public morals.

So Phellion had become a member, to use his own words, of the Areopagus presided over by Minard, and he had just come home from exercising his functions, — as delicate as

they were interesting, to quote him once more, — when the conversation took place which is now to be reported. As being necessary for the apprehension of the subsequent events of this story, and as giving expression to the envious instinct, which is one of the salient features of the middle-class nature, this conversation is indispensable in this place.

The committee meeting had been very stormy.

In discussing a tragedy entitled, ‘*The Death of Hercules*,’ the classical and the romantic factions, which the Mayor had carefully balanced in the selection of his jury, had been ready to tear each other’s hair.

Twice had Phellion risen to speak, and his colleagues had been amazed at the flood of metaphor a major of the National Guard may have at his command when his literary convictions are threatened.

The votes being taken, victory was declared on the side of which Phellion was the eloquent mouth-piece, and as they went down-stairs, he said to Minard : —

‘ We have done good work to-day. This “*Death of Hercules*” reminds me of the “*Death of Hector*” by poor Luce de Lancival, who died ; the piece we have just read is full of sublime lines.’

‘ Yes,’ said Minard, ‘ the verse is neat enough ; there are some good passages, and I confess I place this class of literature a little way above our friend Colleville’s anagrams.’

‘ Oh,’ said Phellion, ‘ Colleville’s anagrams are mere playing with words, and have nothing in common with Melpomene’s stern accents.’

‘ But I assure you,’ said Minard, ‘ he attaches great importance to that nonsense ; and our friend, the musician, has taken great credit to himself for his anagrams, as well as for many other matters. In fact, since they moved to the neighbourhood of the Madeleine, it strikes me that not Colleville only, but his wife, his daughter, the Thuilliers,

and their whole set, have given themselves airs of importance, not altogether justifiable.'

'What do you expect?' said Phellion. 'A man must have a strong brain to stand the heady fumes of opulence. Our friends have gained great riches by the acquisition of the house they have now gone to live in; we must allow them an interval of intoxication. And, really, the dinner they gave us yesterday, by way of a housewarming, was not only abundant, but well served.'

'Well,' said Minard, 'I may flatter myself that I, too, have given a few fairly distinguished dinners, to men of high position in the state, who have not scorned to sit at my table, but I am not therefore unduly puffed up. What I have always been, I am still.'

'You, Monsieur le Maire, have long been accustomed to the handsome mode of life you made for yourself by your remarkable commercial faculties. Our friends, on the contrary, so recently embarked as passengers in the smiling barque of fair fortune, have not yet got their sea-legs, as the phrase is.'

And to cut short a conversation, in which the Mayor's tone was to Phellion's mind rather too caustic, he paused to take leave of him. Their way home lay in different directions.

'Are you going through the Luxembourg?' asked Minard, not choosing to lose his companion.

'I shall cross it, but not remain there. I am to meet Madame Phellion at the end of the broad walk, where she is to wait for me with the Barniol children.'

'Well, then,' said Minard, 'I will give myself the pleasure of greeting Madame Phellion, and at the same time breathe a mouthful of fresh air; for even listening to fine things tires the brain, in such work as we have been doing.'

Minard had quite understood that Phellion did not meet him half-way in response to his rather acrid remarks on Thullier's new establishment. So he made no attempt to

reopen the subject with him ; but when Madame Phellion was his listener, feeling quite sure that his animadversions would find an echo in her, he said : —

‘ Well, lady fair, and what did you think of our dinner yesterday ? ’

‘ It was very well done,’ replied Madame Phellion, ‘ and the moment the *potage à la bisque* was served I perceived that some master-hand such as Chevet had taken the place of the native cook. But it was flat ; it lacked the cordiality of our little meetings in the Quartier Latin. And then did it strike you, as it did me, that neither Madame nor Mademoiselle Thuillier seemed thoroughly at home ? I declare I felt at last as if I were dining with Madame — what is her name ? I cannot get it into my head.’

‘ Torna, Comtesse de Godollo,’ said Phellion, intervening. ‘ But it is a most euphonious name, too.’

‘ As euphonious as you please, my dear ; to my ears it is no name at all.’

‘ It is a Magyar, or, to speak vulgarly, a Hungarian name. Our name, now, if any one chose to quarrel with it, might be said to seem borrowed from the Greek.’

‘ Possibly. But we have the advantage of being well known, not only in our own neighbourhood but the whole educational world, where we have succeeded in making an honourable position ; whereas, that Hungarian Countess who rules the roast in the Thuilliers’ house — where has she dropped from, I should like to know ? Why on earth, with her fine-lady airs — for it cannot be denied that the woman has very elegant manners — why, I say, has she thrown herself into the arms of Brigitte, who, between you and me, smells of the sod, and is the porter’s daughter to a degree that makes one sick ? For my part, I believe that this devoted friend is just an adventuress. She scents a fortune and is plotting some clever way of turning it to advantage.’

‘ Dear me,’ said Minard, ‘ are you still in ignorance of

the beginnings of the intimacy between the Countess and the Thuilliers ?'

'She is one of their tenants. She has the entresol below them.'

'Very true; but there is something more than that. Zélie, my wife, had it from Joséphine, who, at one time, wanted to enter our service; that fell through, however, because our Françoise, who was leaving to get married, changed her mind. You must know then, lady fair, that it was owing entirely to Madame de Godollo that the Thuilliers migrated at all, and she, in fact, was their upholsterer and decorator.'

'What! an upholsterer!' cried Phellion, 'that stylish woman of whom one might truly say: *Incessa patuit dea*, which we very inadequately render by the expression, "she treads like a queen."'

'Nay,' said Minard, 'I do not say that Madame de Godollo actually deals in furniture. But at the time when Mademoiselle Thuillier, by la Peyrade's advice, decided on managing the subletting of the house by the Madeleine, that young gentleman, whose influence is not so paramount as he would like us to believe, could not persuade her, without some strong measure, to go and inhabit the magnificent apartment in her own house, where she received us yesterday. Mademoiselle Brigitte argued that she must alter all her habits,— that her old friends would not come to her in a distant part of town.'

'It is perfectly true,' said Madame Phellion, 'that if we are to be prepared to take a carriage every Sunday, we must have some better amusement in prospect than that we are likely to find in their drawing-room. When you think that, excepting on the evening when they had that little dance in honour of the nomination to the Municipal

Mincil, no one ever dreams of opening the piano !' him half-would indeed have been a pleasure to find such a Thuillier's yours occasionally called into requisition,' said

Minard, ‘but that is an idea that would never enter our good Brigitte’s head. She would have considered that two more wax-lights would be burning. Five-franc pieces make the music she loves. So, when la Peyrade and Thuillier urged her to leave the apartment in the Rue Saint-Dominique-d’Enfer, her one idea was the expense attending the removal. She reflected, and very rightly, that the old lumber out of that house would look queer indeed among all that gilt panelling.’

‘That is how all things hang together,’ exclaimed Phellion, ‘and how, beginning at the top of the social scale, luxury, filtering down to the lower classes, involves empires, sooner or later, in ruin.’

‘There, my dear Major, you touch on one of the vexed questions of social economy. On the other hand, many judicious writers are of opinion that luxury is a very important element in the expansion of trade, which is, no doubt, the life of the state. This view, which is not yours, it would seem, is that, at any rate, of Madame de Godollo, for she is said to have furnished her own rooms very daintily; and to tempt Mademoiselle Thuillier into her own elegant courses she made this proposition: “One of my friends,” said she, “a Russian princess, for whom one of the first decorators in Paris has just made a magnificent suite of furniture, has been suddenly recalled by the Czar, a gentleman who does not understand a joke. So the poor woman is compelled to turn everything she possesses into ready money, and I am sure that she will part with all her furniture for a quarter of what it cost her, to any one who will pay on the nail. It is almost new, and there are some pieces that have never been used.”’

‘So then,’ said Madame Phellion, ‘all the splendour displayed yesterday is cheap and second-hand magnificence!’

‘Just so, Madame,’ answered Minard. ‘And the thing that brought Mademoiselle Brigitte to the point of accepting this splendid offer, was not so much her wish to acquire

new furniture as the idea of securing a great bargain. There is always a vein of Madame la Ressource, in *l'Avare*, in that woman.'

'I think you are mistaken, Monsieur le Maire,' said Phellion. 'Madame la Ressource is a character in *Turcaret*, a very immoral play by Le Sage.'

'Do you think so?' said Minard. 'Possibly.—What at any rate is quite certain is that while the advocate made his way into Brigitte's good graces by enabling her to buy the house, it was by this jobbery over the furniture that the foreign lady gained such a footing. Perhaps, indeed, you may have observed that there is the beginning of a struggle between the two powers—the real and personal estate!'

'Yes, indeed!' cried Madame Phellion, with a sort of glee that showed how interesting she found this conversation. 'I observed that the great lady allowed herself to contradict our young friend the lawyer, and that she even did so with some acerbity.'

'Oh! it is very marked,' replied Minard, 'and he is too keen not to be quite aware of it. And her hostility disturbs him not a little. He easily got round the Thuilliers, for, between you and me, they are not very wide-awake; but in her he feels that he has a capable adversary, and he is anxiously seeking her vulnerable point.'

'Indeed,' said Madame Phellion, 'it is just retribution. This gentleman was for some little time modest and humble, but lately he has assumed the most intolerably domineering airs in that house; he flaunted the son-in-law; and really, in the matter of Thuillier's election, he tricked us all by making every one the stepping-stone to his matrimonial ambitions.'

'Yes,' replied Minard. 'But at this moment I can assure you that the man is at a discount. In the first place he cannot every day find an opportunity of enabling his "dear fellow," as he calls him, to buy a freehold worth a million francs for a mere song.'

‘Then did they get the house so very cheap?’ asked Madame Phellion.

‘They bought it for next to nothing, by means of a rascally intrigue of which Desroches the attorney told me the whole story; as a fact, if the matter came to the knowledge of the Association, it might get our advocate into a very ugly scrape. Now the election to the Chamber lies ahead. Our worthy Thuillier’s appetite has grown with eating; still he perceives already that when he tries to cut that cake, Master la Peyrade will not find it so easy to make us his dupes once more. That is why they have attached an ally in the person of Madame de Godollo, who has high connections, it would seem, in political circles. However, quite apart from this affair, which is still far enough away, the lady is making herself constantly indispensable to Brigitte; for it must be owned that if it were not for the help of the great lady the poor woman in her fine gilded drawing-room would look like a rag in a bride’s wedding outfit.’

‘Oh, Monsieur le Maire, you are too cruel!’ said Madame Phellion with a simper.

‘Nay, but really and truly,’ said Minard, ‘is Brigitte, is Madame Thuillier, in the least capable of presiding over a “Salon”? The Hungarian lady has superintended all the arrangements of the house; it was she who secured the man-servant who is so well trained and so intelligent; it was she who had made out the menu for yesterday’s dinner; in short she is the guardian angel of the colony, which, but for her assistance, must have been the laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood.

‘And there is one very strange thing: instead of being, as you fancied, a mere parasite like the Provençal, this foreign lady, who seems to have a nice little fortune of her own, is not only disinterested but generous. The dresses worn by Brigitte and by Madame Thuillier, which you ladies all remarked, were a present she insisted on making

them ; and it was as a result of her having presided in person at the toilet of our two hostesses, that you saw them yesterday not quite such guys as usual.'

'But what object can she have in view that she shows them such maternal devotion ?' asked Madame Phellion.

'My dear,' said Phellion solemnly, 'human actions are not, thank God ! invariably based on selfish motives and the promptings of greedy interest. There are yet some hearts to be found who love doing good for its own sake. This lady may have seen that our friends were likely to lose their way in a sphere of which they did not appreciate the height ; and, having guided their first steps to the purchase of the furniture, she may, as a foster-mother gets attached to her charge, have found pleasure in giving them the milk of information and advice.'

'Your dear husband !' said Minard to Madame Phellion. 'You would think he meant no harm, and he bites the piece out !'

'I — bite a piece out !' said Phellion. 'I did not intend it, nor is it consonant to my habits.'

'And yet you could hardly put it more plainly that the Thuilliers are perfect fools and that Madame de Godollo has volunteered to bring them up by hand.'

'I decline to accept, on behalf of our friends, an interpretation so derogatory to their high respectability,' replied Phellion. 'All I meant to imply was that perhaps they lack experience, and that this noble lady places her knowledge of the world and its ways at their disposal ; but I protest against any attribution of meaning beyond the idea thus strictly defined.'

'Still, my dear Major, you must admit that there would be something more than want of worldly wisdom in allowing this la Peyrade to marry Céleste. It would be at once stupid and immoral ; for, after all, the advocate's barefaced flirtation with Madame Colleville — '

'Monsieur le Maire,' said Phellion, with aggravated

pomposity, ‘Solon, the great law-giver, would assign no punishment for parricide, believing the crime to be impossible. I think the same of such gross misconduct as you seem to allude to. That Madame Colleville should favour the attentions of Monsieur de la Peyrade while meaning to give him her daughter—no, Monsieur, no! That is beyond my imagining. If she were questioned on the subject before a tribunal, Madame Colleville, like Marie Antoinette, could but reply, “I appeal to all mothers!”’

‘At the same time, my dear,’ said his wife, ‘allow me to tell you that Madame Colleville is abominably profligate, and has very sufficiently proved it.’

‘Enough of this, my dear,’ said Phellion. ‘Indeed, it is near the dinner hour, and it seems to me that by degrees we have allowed the conversation to drift on to the mud-banks of slander.’

‘You are full of illusions, my dear friend,’ said Minard, shaking hands with Phellion; ‘but they are honourable illusions, and I envy you. Madame, I have the honour — ’ added the Mayor, bowing respectfully to Madame Phellion.

And they went their ways.

The information supplied by the worthy Mayor of the eleventh arrondissement was correct.

In the Thuilliers’ drawing-room, since their migration to the Madeleine quarter, the face and figure of a bewitchingly gracious woman was to be found between Brigitte’s asperity and Madame Thuillier’s plaintive indolence, giving the place an unexpected stamp of elegance.

It was also true that by this woman’s instrumentality Brigitte had effected an investment in furniture not less advantageous and far more legitimate than the purchase of the freehold. For six thousand francs she had found herself in possession of a set of furniture not long since in

the workshops, and representing a value of at least thirty thousand francs.

It was no less true that in consequence of this service, which went straight to her heart, the old maid had shown the handsome foreigner a great deal of the respectful deference which her citizen class, in spite of its touchiness and jealousy, is far more ready to pay to titles and high rank in the social hierarchy than is generally supposed. The Hungarian Countess was a woman of great tact and superior education, and while she assumed the tone of lofty control which she thought fit to arrogate over the three persons she chose to patronise, she took good care not to give her influence any taint of irritating or imperious authority. On the contrary, she flattered Brigitte's conceit of being a model housekeeper, and, so far as the material expenses of her own house were concerned, she affected to consult *Miss Thuillier*, as she called her by way of a pet name; so that while she reserved the administration of the sumptuary outlay in her own and her neighbours' rooms, she appeared to be giving and taking useful instruction rather than asserting her patronage.

Even la Peyrade himself could make no mistake as to the fact that his influence was waning before that of the Countess. But this lady's antagonism was not limited to a mere struggle for preëminence. She had boldly expressed her disapproval of his pretensions to Céleste's hand; she extended her protection in the plainest way to Félix the professor's suit; and Minard, who had not failed to discern this, had taken good care not to mention the fact to those whom it most interested, while expatiating on other details.

Théodore was no doubt all the more distressed at finding himself undermined by a hostility which to him seemed inexplicable, because he was conscious of having helped to get this troublesome adversary into the heart of the citadel.

His first blunder had been his rash indulgence in the barren satisfaction of keeping Céritet out of his lease; if

Brigitte had not, by his advice and entreaties, undertaken the subletting on her own account, the odds were that she would never have come near Madame de Godollo.

Another rash act had been to urge the Thuilliers to leave their remote solitude in the Quartier Latin.

But at that time, the blossoming time of his power over them, Théodore believed that his marriage was a settled thing, and he was in an almost childish hurry to take his flight towards the superior sphere which seemed to be opening before him. So he had added his persuasions to those of the Hungarian Countess, feeling as though he were sending the Thuilliers on in advance to make his bed in the handsome apartment he was one day to share with them. And he had foreseen another advantage from this arrangement; it would remove Céleste from the almost daily meetings with a rival whom he could but regard as dangerous. Beyond the distance which made it possible 'to drop in,' Félix could call but seldom; and Théodore would find easier opportunity for lowering him in the opinion of Céleste, who had given him a place in her heart only on condition of his affording her such satisfaction on religious points as had found him refractory.

Still, more than one obstacle had arisen in the way of the Provençal's plans.

If la Peyrade should open wider horizons to the Thuilliers, he would run the risk of introducing rival competitors for the exclusive admiration of which he was now the object. In the provincial atmosphere they breathed, for lack of any standard of comparison, Brigitte and the 'dear fellow' had placed Théodore on an eminence from which he must inevitably be dislodged when seen in juxtaposition with other types of superiority and fashion. Thus, irrespective of the shock obscurely dealt by Madame de Godollo, the idea of establishing the transpontine colony was a bad one so far as the Thuilliers were concerned, and not much better with regard to the Collevilles.

This family had moved with their friends to the new house, renting the entresol at the back, at a price within their means. Colleville, however, complained that the rooms were dark and stuffy, and being compelled to go every day from the Boulevard de la Madeleine to the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, where his office was, he grumbled at the new arrangements to which he was a victim, and was apt to express his opinion that la Peyrade was a perfect tyrant. Madame Colleville, on the other hand, in order to be on a par with the other inhabitants of the quarter where she had taken up her residence, rushed into a perfect orgy of new bonnets, mantles, and dresses; and these, necessitating extra cheques, led to more or less stormy scenes in the household.

Céleste, to be sure, had fewer opportunities of seeing young Phellion, but then there was less chance of her being led into religious discussions; and absence, which endangers none but weak attachments, made her think more tenderly and less theologically of the man of her dreams.

And all those blunders after all were as nothing as compared with another source of humiliation which weighed on Théodore. For the sum of ten thousand francs, which Thuillier had disbursed with a very good grace, la Peyrade had promised him, within a week, the Cross of the Legion of Honour, the secret ambition of his whole life.

Now more than two months had elapsed and not a word had been heard of the glorious bauble; and the ex-second clerk, who would have been so happy in displaying his scrap of red ribbon on the Boulevard de la Madeleine, where he paced the asphalt with assiduous regularity, still had but a flower to grace his buttonhole, the privilege of all men, of which he was much less proud than Béranger.

La Peyrade had of course alluded darkly to some unforeseen and unaccountable obstacle which had paralyzed all the efforts and all the good-will of the Comtesse de Bruel; but Thuillier did not take this explanation kindly, and in

his acute disappointment he was often within an ace of saying, like Chicaneau in *Les Plaideurs*: ‘Then give me back the money !’ However, he did not come to this point because la Peyrade kept a hold over him through the famous pamphlet on ‘Taxation and Redemption.’ The fuss of removal had hindered its completion. While all that excitement was in the air Thuillier could not give his mind to the correction of the proofs, which, it may be remembered, he reserved the right to criticise minutely.

The lawyer, clearly understanding that he must strike some decisive blow to restore his fast-evaporating influence, seized on this haggling mood to be the fulcrum, as he hoped, of a scheme no less deep-laid than bold.

One day, when they were at work on the last pages of the pamphlet, a discussion arose over the word *nepotism*, which Thuillier wished to eliminate from a sentence written by la Peyrade, declaring he had never met with it, and that it was a *neologism*, that is to say, in the literary notions of the middle-class man, almost as bad as the idea of 1793 and the Reign of Terror. As a rule Théodore took his ‘dear fellow’s’ ridiculous notions patiently enough; but that morning he got very angry, informing Thuillier that he might finish the work himself, since he chose to criticise it with such acumen and intelligence; and for a few days they did not meet.

At first Thuillier supposed this to mean merely a passing fit of temper; but as time went on and la Peyrade did not return, he felt that he must take some steps towards a reconciliation, so he called on the Provençal to apologise and put an end to this fit of the sulks. Wishing, however, to give this action such a turn as would leave a loophole for his self-respect, he went in with an off-hand air and said:—

‘I find, my dear boy, that we were both in the right. *Nepotism* means the authority assumed by the Pope’s nephews in the direction of the State. I looked in the dictionary and that is the only meaning given; but from what Phellion

tells me it would seem that in political parlance the meaning of the word has been extended to include the influence exercised illegally by the connivance of corrupt ministers. So I believe the expression may stand, though it is not used in that sense by Napoléon Landais.'

La Peyrade, who, while receiving his visitor, affected to be absorbed in the arrangement of his papers, merely shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

'Well,' said Thuillier, 'have you looked at the proofs of the two last sheets? — for we really must get on.'

'If you have sent nothing to the printers,' replied la Peyrade, 'we are not likely to get proofs. So far as I am concerned, I have not touched the manuscript.'

'But, my dear Théodore, you cannot have your back up; surely, for such a trifle. I do not pretend to be a skilled writer; only, as I put my name to the thing, I think I may be allowed an opinion as to a word.'

'But *Môsieu Phellion*,' retorted the lawyer, 'is an author; and since you consult him, I do not see why you should not ask him to help you to finish the work, on which, I promise you, I will not touch another line.'

'Good heavens! What a temper!' cried Thuillier. 'Now you are in a rage because I ventured to doubt the use of an expression, and took another opinion. But you knew perfectly well that I had read part of it to Phellion, Colleville, Minard, and Barniol, as if the work were my own, to judge of its effect on the public, and that is no reason why I should sign my name to anything they might choose to write. To give you an idea of the confidence I have in you: Madame de Godollo, to whom I was reading a few pages of it last evening, told me that the pamphlet was quite enough to get me into trouble with the public prosecutor; and do you suppose that would stop me?'

'Indeed,' said la Peyrade sarcastically, 'the oracle of your household seems to me very far-sighted, and I have no wish to bring your head to the block.'

'All that is pure nonsense,' said Thuillier. 'Do you or do you not intend to leave me in the lurch?'

'Literary questions,' replied the lawyer, 'lead to quarrels between the best friends even more often than political differences. I wish to eliminate every subject of debate between us.'

'But, my dear Théodore, I never set up for being a man of letters; I believe I am possessed of vulgar common sense, and I say what I mean. You cannot blame me for that, and if you play me such a scurvy trick as to refuse me your help, it must certainly be because something else rankles of which I am wholly unconscious.'

'Why a scurvy trick? Nothing can be easier for you than not to write the pamphlet; you will still be Jérôme Thuillier as you are now.'

'But it was you who were of opinion that this publication might contribute to my election to the Chamber. Besides, as I tell you, I have read portions of it to all our friends. I have spoken of the pamphlet in the Municipal Council, and if it now fails to appear I shall be discredited; it will be said that the Government has bribed me.'

'You have only to say that you are the friend of the incorruptible Phellion; that will be a sufficient answer. You might even marry Céleste to his nincompoop of a son. Such a connection would protect you even better against any suspicions.'

'Théodore,' said Thuillier, 'there is something on your mind which you will not tell me. It is not in nature that you should involve your friend in such loss of respect for a simple matter of one word.'

'Well, yes, then, if you will have it,' said la Peyrade, with an air of effort; 'I cannot bear ingratitude.'

'Nor can I,' said Thuillier, with some spirit. 'And if you mean that you accuse me of anything so mean and vile, I demand an explanation. We must at last speak out! What have you to complain of? Of what do you

accuse me — the man whom, but a few days since, you called your friend ?'

'Nothing — and everything,' said Théodore ; 'your sister and you are far too clever to quarrel openly with a man who has put a million francs in your pockets at the risk of his good name. But I am not so simple but that I can understand shades of meaning. There are persons about you who are making it their business to undermine me, and Brigitte's one idea is to discover some decent excuse for not keeping her promises. Men such as I do not urge this kind of claim, and I certainly have no wish to force myself on anybody ; but I confess I was far from expecting such treatment.'

'Come, come,' said Thuillier, seeing in the lawyer's eye the glitter of a tear, which completely deceived him ; 'I am sure I do not know what Brigitte may have done, but one thing is certain, I have never ceased to be your sincerest friend.'

'Oh, no,' said la Peyrade ; 'since I failed in the matter of the Cross, I am of no further use but to throw to the dogs. And can I, do you suppose, make head against occult powers ? Why, dear me ! It is, perhaps, this very pamphlet — of which you have talked too much by a great deal — which annoys the Government, and hinders your being promoted. The ministry are such owls that they would rather wait to have their hand forced by the success of the work, than yield gracefully and reward you simply for past services. But these are political mysteries which are not likely to occur to your sister's mind.'

'Deuce take it !' said Thuillier. 'I fancy I am pretty clear-sighted, and really I cannot see that Brigitte has changed in her treatment of you.'

'Most true !' said la Peyrade. 'Your sight is so keen that you do not even see that Madame de Godollo always at her heels, and that she cannot live without her !'

'So!' said Thuillier, enlightened, 'we are suffering from a little fit of jealousy.'

'Jealousy!' retorted la Peyrade. 'I do not know that it is quite the right word. But, at any rate, your sister, who is not at all above the common run, and whom you, a man of such superior intellect, have allowed to usurp the authority she enjoys and abuses—'

'How can I help it, my dear boy?' interrupted Thuillier, inhaling the compliment, 'she is so absolutely devoted to me.'

'Such weakness is very pardonable,' said Théodore, 'still, I repeat it, your sister is no match for your little finger. Well, as I was saying, when a man of such intelligence, as you will, I am sure, allow me, does her the honour to advise her and serve her as zealously as I have done, it cannot be pleasant for him to see himself cut out, supplanted in her confidence, by a woman fallen from heaven knows where, and all on account of some frippery curtains and old chairs she was able to buy cheap.'

'With women, as you know,' said Thuillier, 'household economy is paramount.'

'And I may tell you that Brigitte, who meddles in everything, also imagines she can rule our love affairs with a high hand. Since you are so clear-sighted, you must have observed that in Brigitte's mind nothing is less settled than my marriage to Mademoiselle Colleville. And yet my affection has been solemnly authorised by you.'

'Yes, and by heaven,' said Thuillier, 'I should like to see anybody try to meddle with our arrangements.'

'Setting Brigitte aside,' replied the lawyer, 'I can tell you of some one who is quite determined to meddle, and that is Mademoiselle Céleste herself. In spite of the apparent barrier between them, in their difference of opinion on religious questions, her head is very candidly full of that young Phellion.'

'And why not insist on Flavie's setting that to rights?'

'Flavie, my dear fellow! No one knows what she is better than you. She is the woman rather than the mother. I found myself let in for a little mild love-making; and though she approves of the marriage, you understand she has not set her heart on it.'

'Very well,' said Thuillier, 'then I will take it upon myself to speak to Céleste. It shall not be said that we were beaten by a little girl.'

'On no account,' cried la Peyrade; 'I particularly wish that you should not interfere in this matter. Excepting as regards your sister, you have a will of iron, and I will not have it said that you forced Céleste into my arms. On the contrary, I wish the child to be left sole mistress of her heart; only I think I have a right to ask that she should decide definitely between me and Monsieur Félix, for I really cannot remain in this suspense, which is undermining me. That the marriage should be hung up till you are elected deputy is too vague; I cannot submit to see the most important step of my life left to the chances of the future; besides, this arrangement, to which I gave in at first, has the smell of a bargain about it which I do not at all like.'

'I feel that I must tell you a secret; a confidence to which I am driven by all the difficulties I am exposed to. Dutocq can tell you that before you lost the house in Rue Saint-Dominique, an heiress was proposed to me, in his presence, quite seriously, with a larger fortune than you can leave to Mademoiselle Colleville. I refused — because I am fool enough to have lost my heart, and because a connection with so respectable a family as yours seems to me supremely desirable. Still, Brigitte must be made to understand that, even if Céleste throws me over, I am not left destitute.'

'That I can easily believe,' said Thuillier. 'But to leave the whole decision to that little brain — especially if, as you say, she has a fancy for Félix!'

'That I cannot consider,' said the lawyer. 'At any cost I must escape from the present predicament — it is intolerable, so far as I am concerned. You talk of your pamphlet, I am incapable of finishing it. You, as a man who have known something of women, must be well aware of the dominion the malignant creatures can exert over our life and being.'

'Yes indeed!' said Thuillier fatuously. 'I have been a lover; but I have not often been a slave; I have taken some and left others.'

'But I, with my southern temperament, am a prey to passion; besides, Céleste has a greater charm than the mere success of winning favours. Brought up as she has been by you, under your eye, she is an adorable girl; but it is folly to have allowed that young fellow, who is in every respect unsuitable, to take possession of her fancy.'

'You are right ten times over. But they have been intimate from their childhood; Félix and she played together, and you only appeared on the scene at a later date. In fact, it is a proof of our high opinion of you, that as soon as you came we were ready to give up our old plans.'

'You were, yes,' said Théodore. 'You, with literary ideas and proclivities, — often full of brilliant wit and good sense, — have a heart of gold. With you I know where I stand, and you know what you want; but you will see, if you say a word to Brigitte about hastening on this marriage, she will fight tooth and nail.'

'I believe firmly that Brigitte has always wished to see you her son-in-law, if I may so express myself; but if she does not, I beg you to rest assured that in matters of importance I can assert my will. Only let us be sure exactly what it is that you want. Then we will start, — left, right, — and you will see all will be well.'

'I want, in the first place,' said la Peyrade, 'to put

the finishing touches to your pamphlet, for you must be my first consideration.'

'Certainly,' said Thuillier; 'it would not do to be wrecked in sight of land.'

'Well, then. Starting from the idea that I am annihilated, overthrown by the thought of this marriage which remains hung up, I tell you you will not get a page out of me, by hook or by crook, till the question is settled.'

'And what is the question; how do you formulate it?' asked Thuillier.

'Obviously, if Céleste decides against me, I must wish to know my fate at once. If it is my fate to marry, for "reason," at least I ought not to miss the opportunity of which I have spoken.'

'Very good. And how much time do you give us?'

'It seems to me that any girl may know her own mind in the course of a fortnight.'

'Beyond a doubt. But I do not like the idea of Céleste's pronouncing sentence without appeal.'

'I will take my chance. I shall be released from suspense, which is the most important point; and then, between you and me, I am not staking so rashly as you might think. It is not in a fortnight that a son of Phellion's, that is to say, obstinacy incarnate in folly, will get over his philosophic doubts; and Céleste will certainly not accept him for her husband till he has given proofs of conversion.'

'That is highly probable. But supposing Céleste were to temporise, and would not decide on either alternative?'

'That is your business,' said the Provençal. 'I do not know what parental authority may be in Paris, but I do know that in our good town of Avignon and those parts I never heard of a little girl being allowed such liberty. If you, and your sister,—granting that she plays fair,—and a father and mother, cannot among you make a child, on whom you are bestowing a fortune, agree to a request so simple and reasonable as that she should freely choose

between two suitors — good-morning ! You must write over the door of your house that Céleste is queen and sovereign.'

'We have not quite come to that,' said Thuillier, with a competent air.

'As to you, old fellow, I must put you off till Céleste has made up her mind. Then, for good or for ill, I will set to work, and in three days it will be finished.'

'At any rate,' said Thuillier, 'I know what you have on your mind. I will talk it over with Brigitte.'

'That is but a lame conclusion,' said la Peyrade. 'However, so matters stand, unfortunately.'

'What do you mean ?'

'I should, as you may suppose, prefer to be told that the matter is settled. But old creases cannot be smoothed out.'

'What then ! Do you imagine that I am a man devoid of will and independence ?'

'No. But I should like to be in a corner to see how you will open the question with your sister.'

'I shall open it very frankly, and a very determined *I will* shall settle every objection.'

'Oh, my dear old fellow,' said la Peyrade, slapping him on the shoulder, 'since the time of Chrysale, in *Les Femmes Savantes*, how much warlike thunder has lowered its tone before the will of a woman accustomed to domineer !'

'That remains to be seen,' said Thuillier, effecting a stage exit.

His anxiety to see the pamphlet finished, and the doubts so ingeniously hinted as to the inflexibility of his will, had turned him into a raging tiger. He went away in the mood to put the whole household to fire and sword, if his will were defied.

As soon as he was at home, he attacked Brigitte on the subject. She, with her crude good sense and selfishness, pointed out to him that by thus hurrying forward the time

originally fixed for la Peyrade's marriage, they were very foolishly disarming themselves ; they could not feel certain that, when the election should take place, the lawyer would still devote himself with zeal to insuring their success. 'It would be the Legion of Honour over again,' said the old maid.

'There is a difference,' replied Thuillier. 'The Cross does not depend directly on la Peyrade, whereas he can make what use he pleases of the influence he has acquired in the twelfth arrondissement.'

'And if it should be his pleasure,' retorted Brigitte, 'when we have set him on his feet, to use it for himself — the fellow is ambitious.'

This danger did, indeed, strike the hopeful candidate ; still, he fancied there was some guarantee in la Peyrade's moral sense.

'The man has not a delicate sense of honour,' said Brigitte, 'who comes to force a bargain on you ; and this way of making us dance on our hind-legs like poodles, for a lump of sugar, before giving you the end of your pamphlet, does not please me at all. Could you not get Phelion to help you, and be rid of Théodore ? Or else, now I think of it, Madame de Godollo, who knows all the political world, could no doubt find you a journalist. They are all out at elbows, I have heard ; for twenty crowns the thing would be done.'

'And my secret,' said Thuillier, 'would be known to three or four persons. No ; I positively need la Peyrade ; he feels it, and can dictate terms. And, after all, we promised he should marry Céleste ; it is forestalling it by a year at most — a year ? — a few months, a few weeks only, perhaps ; the King may dissolve the Chamber at the moment when no one expects it.'

'But if Céleste will have nothing to say to him,' Brigitte suggested.

'Céleste ! Céleste, indeed !' cried Thuillier. 'She must

do what is required of her. That should have been thought of before we pledged ourselves to la Peyrade; for, after all, we have given him our word. And are we not giving the child a choice between him and Phellion?

'So that if Céleste should decide in favour of Félix,' said the sceptical Brigitte, 'you would still believe in la Peyrade's devotion to you?'

'What can I do? These are his conditions. Besides, the rascal has calculated closely. He knows that Félix will never make up his mind to bring the girl a certificate of confession, and that, short of that, the little slut will never accept him as her husband. La Peyrade's game is a very clever one.'

'Much too clever,' said Brigitte. 'However, settle the business as you choose. I will have nothing to do with it; all these roundabout ways are not to my taste.'

Thuillier next saw Madame Colleville, and intimated to her that she was to communicate to Céleste the plans that depended on her.

Céleste had never been officially authorised to indulge her inclinations with regard to Félix Phellion. On the contrary, at an earlier stage of affairs, Flavie had expressly forbidden her to give the young professor any hope; still, as she felt herself supported by Madame Thuillier, her godmother, the sole recipient of her confidence, she gently let herself glide, without particularly troubling herself as to the difficulties that might some day stand in the way of her choice. Consequently, when she was commanded to decide between Félix and Théodore, the guileless girl saw only one side of the alternative, and fancied that she had gained an immense advantage by an arrangement which left her free to dispose of herself in obedience to the impulse of her heart.

But la Peyrade had not been mistaken when he reckoned on the young girl's religious intolerance on one hand, and, on the other, on Phellion's philosophic obduracy, as invincible obstacles to their engagement.

On the very evening of the day when Flavie had received instructions to communicate to Céleste the sovereign will of Thuillier, the Phellions came to spend the evening with Brigitte, and a lively encounter took place between these two young people. Mademoiselle Colleville did not need the warning hinted by her mother that it would be highly indelicate to introduce into her controversial arguments any reference to the conditional approbation vouchsafed to their affection. Céleste was at once too honourable and too fervently religious to wish that the man she loved should owe his conversion to any motive but conviction.

The evening was spent in theological discussions, and love is so strange a Proteus and can assume such undreamed-of shapes, that he figured that evening in the black robe and beretta with far better grace than might be supposed. Still Phellion fils was extraordinarily ill-starred in this encounter, of which he knew not the importance. Besides yielding nothing, he affected a light and ironical tone, and put poor Céleste at last into such a frenzy of distress that she conveyed to him her wish that all should be at an end, and that he should never speak to her again.

In such a case a lover of more experience would have seen her again the next morning, for two hearts are never nearer to a mutual understanding than when they have agreed to the necessity of an eternal parting. But this law is not to be found in a table of logarithms, and Félix, quite incapable of divining it, believed himself seriously and forever forbidden her presence; in fact, during the whole fortnight granted the girl for mature deliberation (as the French code has it in certain questions of inheritance), though Céleste was expecting him every day and every minute, and thinking no more of la Peyrade than if he had nothing to do with the matter, the pitiable youth never had the remotest thought of breaking the ban.

Fortunately for this uninspired lover, a benevolent fairy was keeping guard over him, and this was what happened

on the day before that on which Céleste was to pronounce her decision.

It was a Sunday, on which day the Thuilliers still held their weekly receptions.

Madame Phellion, fully convinced that the system of greasing the cook's palm, or, as the French say, 'making the basket dance,' is often the ruin of a prosperous household, was in the habit of going to market herself at the shops whence she supplied herself. From time immemorial in the Phellion family Sunday was sacred to the pot-au-feu (the stewed beef that is a standing dish in French households), and the great citizen's wife in the carefully shabby attire affected by ladies when they go marketing, had come back very prosaically from the butcher's, followed by the cook, who carried in her basket a noble cut of fresh top-side of beef. Twice already had she rung at her door, and a terrific storm was gathering to fall on the head of the boy who by his delay was placing his mistress in a far worse predicament than that of Louis XIV., who was only *almost* kept waiting. In her furious impatience, Madame Phellion had just given the bell a third and violent pull. Imagine her confusion and disturbance when at this very moment a small coupé came rattling up to the main door of the house, she saw a lady step out, and in this untimely and unlooked-for caller she recognised the elegant Countess Torna de Godollo.

The unhappy housewife, blushing purple, lost her head and plunged headlong into apologies; she would no doubt have aggravated her already painful position, but that happily Phellion, startled by the repeated peals of the bell, came out of his study robed in his dressing-gown and crowned with a smoking-cap, to see what was the matter.

After a speech of which the pompous grace went far towards compensating for the costume it was intended to excuse, the citizen, with the calm presence of mind that never deserted him, gallantly offered his arm to the fair

foreigner, and, having led her into the drawing-room, began : —

‘ May I without indiscretion ask you, Madame la Comtesse, to what we owe the unexpected honour of this visit ? ’

‘ I was anxious,’ said the Hungarian lady, ‘ to speak with Madame Phellion of a matter she must have much at heart. I never have a chance of seeing her alone; so, though indeed we are hardly acquainted, I made so bold as to seek her here.’

‘ Nay, indeed, Madame, you do our humble dwelling honour. But what has become of Madame Phellion ? ’ the good man impatiently added, and he went to the door.

‘ No, I entreat you,’ said the Countess, ‘ do not disturb her. I have come clumsily enough just at an inconvenient moment for her household arrangements. Brigitte is beginning to train me very well, and I know that the cares of a house-mistress ought to be respected. And, after all, I am not to be pitied ; I have the consolation of your company, on which I had not ventured to count.’

Before Phellion could reply to this amiable speech, Madame Phellion came in ; a cap with smart bows had taken the place of her market-bonnet and an ample shawl covered the other defects of her morning attire. As his wife came in, Phellion was about to withdraw.

‘ Monsieur Phellion,’ said the Countess, ‘ you will not be in the way at the conference I have sought with Madame. On the contrary, your admirable judgment can only be valuable in throwing light on a subject in which you are as deeply interested as your excellent wife ; it is the marriage of your son.’

‘ Of my son ! ’ echoed Madame Phellion, with great amazement ; ‘ why, I did not know that anything of the kind was just now under discussion.’

‘ That Monsieur Félix should marry Céleste, is, I fancy,

a thing you wish, if not actually a project?' said the Countess.

'We have taken no definite steps to that end, Madame,' said Phellion.

'I know that — only too well,' replied the Hungarian lady, 'for, on the contrary, every member of your family seems to be doing their utmost to counteract my efforts. However, one thing is clear, and that is, that in spite of all the silence, and I may say quite plainly, all the clumsiness, that has attended this business, the two young people love each other and will be greatly to be pitied if they are not united. It is to avert that disaster that I have taken the step of calling on you this morning.'

'We cannot but be deeply touched, Madame, by the interest you are so kind as to feel in our boy's happiness; but, to tell the truth, that interest — '

'Is so inexplicable,' the lady hastily put in, 'that it rouses your suspicions?'

'Oh! Madame,' said Phellion, with a respectfully deprecating bow.

'Bless me,' said the Hungarian, 'the explanation is extremely simple. I have studied Céleste, and in that sweet and artless child I can discern a moral steadfastness which would make me greatly regret her being sacrificed.'

'Indeed it is true, Madame. Céleste is an angel of sweetness.'

'As regards Monsieur Félix, I venture to feel an interest in him, for I see in him the worthy son of a most virtuous father — '

'Madame, spare me!' said Phellion, with another low bow.

'But he also has, in my eyes, the charm of that shyness of true love which may be seen in all his looks and heard in his speech. We women find infinite delight in seeing the passion under an aspect which threatens no disappointment, no disillusionments.'

'My son, to be sure, is not showy,' said Madame Phellion, with a hardly perceptible touch of rancour. 'He is not a young man of fashion.'

'But he has more essential qualities,' the Countess went on, 'merit unconscious of itself, the crown of intellectual superiority.'

'Really, Madame,' said Phellion, 'you compel us to hear things—'

'Which are not in excess of the truth,' interrupted the Countess. 'Another reason which leads me to exert myself for the happiness of these two young people is that I have no interest whatever in that of Monsieur de la Peyrade, who is false and avaricious. That man hopes to build up the success of his inveigling schemes on the ruins of their happiness.'

'There can be no doubt,' said Phellion, 'that there are impenetrable depths in Monsieur de la Peyrade on which it is difficult to cast a gleam of light.'

'And as it is my misfortune,' Madame Godollo went on, 'to have a man of that character for a husband, the mere thought of all the misery in store for Céleste under such an unhappy union inspired me, for her sake, with the charitable impulse which now I hope has ceased to surprise you.'

'We did not need such conclusive explanations as you have given us to throw light on your conduct, Madame,' said Phellion. 'But with regard to the blunders by which we have nullified your generous efforts, I must own that, with a view to preserving us from repeating them, it might be as well if you would point them out to us.'

'How long is it, for instance,' said the Countess, 'since any member of your family set foot in the Thuilliers' house?'

'Well, if I remember rightly,' said Phellion, 'we were there on the Sunday after the house-warming dinner.'

'Yes, a full fortnight!' said the lady. 'And do you suppose that nothing happens in a fortnight?'

‘Certainly, much may happen, since in 1830 it took only three days to overthrow a perjured dynasty and found the order of things under which we now live.’

‘You see,’ said Madame de Godollo. ‘Well, and that evening, did nothing pass between Céleste and your son?’

‘Indeed, they had a most painful explanation on the matter of my son’s religious views. For it must be owned that good little Céleste, who is in every other respect a charming creature, is somewhat fanatical on the question of piety.’

‘That I grant,’ said the Countess. ‘But she has been brought up by such a mother—as you know. She has never seen the face of true piety, only its mask. Repentant Magdalens of the type of Madame Colleville always insist on pretending to live in a desert with a death’s head for company. They fancy it impossible to be saved on cheaper terms. But, after all, what was it that Céleste asked of Monsieur Félix? That he should read the *Imitation of Christ*.’

‘He had read it, Madame,’ said Phellion, ‘he considers it a very well written book; but his convictions, unfortunately, have not been even shaken by reading it.’

‘And do you think it skilful of him not to have been able to yield one jot of his inflexible convictions to his lady love?’

‘My son, Madame, never had from me the least training in such skill; honesty and good faith are the principles I endeavoured to inculcate.’

‘It does not seem to me, Monsieur, that a man is false to his honour when, in dealing with a perverse mood, he goes a little out of his way to avoid irritating it. However, admitting that Monsieur Félix owed it to his self-respect to be the iron wall against which Céleste’s entreaties beat in vain; was that a reason, after this scene—which was not the first of the kind, though it was by way of being final—that, when he had the chance of meeting her in

Brigitte's drawing-room, which is neutral ground, he should sulk in his tents for a fortnight? Above all, that he should crown this fit of temper by a proceeding which is quite beyond my comprehension, and which, having just come to our knowledge, has filled Céleste at once with despair and with a feeling of extreme indignation ?'

'Can my son have been capable of any such proceeding? Impossible, Madame!' cried Phellion. 'What it is I know not, but I cannot hesitate to say that you must have been misinformed.'

'And yet nothing can be more certain. Young Collerville, who to-day has an *exeat*, has just told us that for more than a week Monsieur Félix, who has latterly been coming to give him his lesson every alternate day, with the greatest punctuality, has entirely ceased to come near him. Now, unless your son is ill, I cannot help saying that this is to the last degree ill-judged. In the position in which he stood to the sister, he should rather have given the boy two lessons a day, than select such a moment for withdrawing his help.'

The Phellions, husband and wife, looked at each other as if in consultation as to their reply.

'My son, Madame,' said Madame Phellion, 'is not exactly ill; but since you lead us to speak, by telling us of this fact,—which is, I must own, most extraordinary and utterly unlike his character and habit of mind,—I must confess that since the day when Céleste seemed to convey that all was at end between them, Félix has been in a very strange state of mind. Monsieur Phellion and I are much worried about it.'

'Yes, Madame,' Phellion added, 'the young man is certainly not himself.'

'What, then, ails him?' asked the Countess, with much interest.

'In the first place,' said Phellion, 'that evening, after the scene, my son, on his return home, shed burning tears

on his mother's shoulder, giving us to understand that his happiness was ruined for life.'

'So far all is natural enough,' said Madame de Godollo; 'lovers always see the darkest side of everything.'

'No doubt,' said Madame Phellion; 'but from that moment Félix has never even remotely alluded to his misfortune, and on the following day he threw himself into his studies again with a sort of frenzy; do you think that equally natural?'

'Even that may be accounted for. Study is said to be a great comforter.'

'Nothing can be more true,' observed Phellion. 'But in all my son's appearance and conduct there is a touch of excitement, and at the same time an intensity of concentration, that you can scarcely conceive of. If you speak to the youth, he seems not to hear; he sits down to the table and forgets to eat; or takes his food with such indifference as the medical faculty considers very bad for the digestion; he has to be reminded of his ordinary duties and regular occupations, and he is generally regularity itself. Then, the other day, while he was at the Observatory, where he now spends every evening, never coming in till very late, I took upon myself to go into his room and look over his papers. I was appalled, Madame, at finding a note-book full of algebraical calculations which seemed to me to extend beyond the powers of the human intellect.'

'Perhaps he is on the track of some grand problem,' said the Countess.

'Or on the road to madness,' said Madame Phellion, with a sigh, and lowering her voice.

'That is hardly likely,' said Madame de Godollo; 'a man of such a calm temperament and sound good sense is not liable to such disaster. But I know of a misfortune far more imminent, between this and to-morrow, if we cannot effect a master-stroke this evening. Céleste may indeed be lost to him forever.'

'How is that?' asked the parents, in a breath.

'Perhaps you are not aware,' the lady went on, 'that Thuillier and his sister definitely pledged themselves to promote a marriage between Céleste and Monsieur de la Peyrade?'

'We had our suspicions,' replied Madame Phellion.

'Still, the fulfilment of the bargain was fixed for a somewhat remote date, and contingent on certain conditions. Monsieur de la Peyrade, after securing them the possession of their new house, was to obtain for Monsieur Thuillier the Cross of the Legion of Honour, to write a political pamphlet in his name, and to conduct an election by which he was to win a seat in the Chamber of Deputies. It was like a romance of chivalry in which the hero, to obtain the hand of the princess, was required to exterminate a dragon.'

'The Countess is very witty,' said Madame Phellion to her husband, who signed to her not to interrupt.

'I have not time,' the Countess went on, 'nor is it of any use to expatiate on the tricks by which Monsieur de la Peyrade has managed to hurry matters to a conclusion. What it is important that you should know is this: by his contrivance, Céleste has been compelled to make a final choice between him and Monsieur Félix. The poor child was given a fortnight in which to decide; the time is up to-morrow, and in consequence of the disastrous effect on her mind, produced by your son's attitude and conduct, there is very real danger that she may sacrifice her best feelings and instincts to the evil promptings of her outraged affections.'

'But what is to be done, Madame?' asked Phellion.

'Fight it out, Monsieur. Come in full force this evening to the Thuilliers, persuade Monsieur Félix to accompany you, lecture him well, and make him yield a little of the rigidity of his philosophical opinions. "Paris is worth a Mass," said Henri IV.; at any rate, let him avoid such

questions. Surely, his heart can supply him with accents that may appeal to the woman who loves him, and that is a long stride towards her thinking him in the right. I shall be there. I will help him to the utmost of my power; and perhaps, on the spur of the moment, I may hit on some means of making my support effective. One thing is certain, a great battle must be fought this evening, and if we do not, every one of us, do our duty, the victory may be won by that la Peyrade.'

'My son is not at home, Madame,' answered Phellion, 'and I am very sorry, for your eager interest and warm encouragement might have shaken him from his torpor. However, I will set all the gravity of the case before his eyes, and he shall most undoubtedly accompany us this evening to the Thuilliers' house.'

'I need not say,' added the Countess, as she rose, 'that we must carefully avoid every appearance of collusion. We must not consult together, and unless the circumstances should quite naturally lead to it, we had better not even speak to each other.'

'Rely on my prudence, Madame,' replied Phellion, 'and, at the same time, permit me to offer you the expression —'

'Of your most respectful esteem!' interrupted the lady, laughing.

'No, Madame, I reserve that for the close of a letter,' answered Phellion solemnly. 'Allow me, I beg of you, to express my most fervent and perpetual gratitude.'

'We will talk about that, when we are out of the scrape,' said Madame de Godollo, going towards the door, 'and if Madame Phellion, the tenderest and most virtuous of wives and mothers, will grant me a small place in her regard, I shall be more than paid for my exertions.'

Madame Phellion plunged into compliments without end. The Countess, handed to her carriage by Phellion, was already out of sight, while Phellion was still sending after her a volley of respectful thanks.

By degrees, as the company from the Quartier Latin dwindled away from Brigitte's drawing-room, and showed diminished assiduity, a more living stratum of Parisian vitality filtered in. The town councillor had drawn some important recruits from among his colleagues on the Municipal Board and the upper employés in the préfecture; the Mayor of the arrondissement and his deputies, on whom Thuillier had called on settling in his new house, had hastened to return the civility, and a few of the officers of the First Legion had also called.

The house itself had contributed a contingent; several newly established tenants lent a fresh aspect to the Sunday evening parties. Among these must be mentioned Rabourdin, formerly the head of the room in which Thuillier had had a place in the Exchequer. Having been so unhappy as to lose his wife, whose 'salon' had once held its own in rivalry with Madame Colleville's, Rabourdin now lived in bachelor quarters on the third floor, over the rooms let to Cardot, the honorary notary. In consequence of an odious case of favouritism, by which he was passed over, he sent in his resignation of the public service, and at the time when Thuillier again came across him he was a director of one of the myriad projected railways, which was constantly postponed by parliamentary rivalry and delays.

It may here be incidentally mentioned that Phellion's meeting again with this really clever man of business, now a man of consequence in the financial world, afforded this worthy and honest citizen an opportunity of once more showing his native magnanimity. At the time when Rabourdin had found himself compelled to retire, Phellion alone, of all the clerks in his department, had been faithful to him in his reverses. Rabourdin, now in a position to dispense places, as soon as chance threw his staunch supporter in his way, was prompt to offer him an easy and lucrative position.

‘Môsieur,’ said Phellion, ‘your kindness touches me, and does me honour, but in honesty I must make a confession, which I can but beg you not to take amiss: I have no belief in these iron roads or railways.’

‘You have every right to your own opinion,’ said Rabourdin, with a smile. ‘But meanwhile we are remunerating our servants on a very satisfactory scale, and I should be happy to have you on my staff. I know by experience that you are a man to be relied on.’

‘Môsieur,’ said the Great Citizen, ‘I did my duty and nothing more. As to the offer you are good enough to make me, I cannot accept it. I am content with my modest position; I do not need or wish to embark on a more responsible career; I may say, with the Latin poet:—

“*Claudite jam vivos, pueri, sat prata biberunt.*”

Thus raised in the social scale, the Thuilliers’ evenings now needed another element of vitality, and to speak like Madelon in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, this ‘frightful dearth of amusement,’ of which Madame Phellion had spoken to Minard, needed a remedy. Thanks to Madame de Godollo, the general in command, who took advantage of Colleville’s connection with the musical world, some performers introduced a variety into the perpetual boston and *bouillotte*. Then these old-fashioned games soon made way for whist, the only amusement, said the Hungarian, by which decent people could kill time.

Just as Louis XVI. began by setting the example of the reforms under which his throne was ultimately crushed, Brigitte at first encouraged this domestic revolution, and her wish to maintain her position becomingly in the neighbourhood to which she had made up her mind to move, made her docile to every suggestion for comfort and elegance. But on the day when the scene occurred which we are about to relate, a detail, apparently trivial, had suddenly revealed to her the danger of the slope on which she was standing.

Most of the new guests invited by Thuillier were ignorant of his sister's supremacy in the house; on arriving, they begged their host to introduce them to Madame Thuillier, and he, of course, could not tell them that his wife was but a dummy queen trembling under the iron hand of a Richelieu in petticoats, who was the sole responsible authority. So it was only after their first homage had been paid to the titular sovereign that these newcomers were presented to Brigitte, and the sternness of her demeanour, resulting from her vexation at this transfer of dignity, hardly encouraged them to take any further trouble to please her.

Alive to this loss of importance—‘If I do not take care,’ thought this Queen Elizabeth, with the keen instinct for preëminence which was her consuming passion, ‘I shall become a mere nobody.’

And pondering this idea, she began to think that under the conditions of a common household shared with la Peyrade as Céleste’s husband, the decline she was beginning to fear might be further complicated. At once, by some sudden intuition, Félix Phellion—a good young man, too much absorbed in mathematics ever to become a formidable rival to her rule—struck her as a far more suitable match than the audacious lawyer; so, when she saw the Phelliots arrive without their son, she was the first to be uneasy at his absence. In spite of Madame de Godollo’s advances, this shocking lover had acted on the last line of Millevoye’s famous lament:—

*“Et son amant ne vint pas.”*

(The beloved came not.)

As may easily be supposed, Brigitte was not the only person to remark the luckless youth’s rigid absenteeism; Madame Thuillier very guilelessly, and Céleste with assumed indifference, also expressed their surprise. As to Madame de Godollo, who, though she had a remarkably fine voice, had hitherto needed much entreating to sing,

when she perceived how little heed Félix had paid to her counsels, she went to beg Madame Phellion to be good enough to accompany her, and between the two verses of a fashionable ballad :—

‘Where is your son?’ she asked.

‘He is coming presently,’ answered Madame Phellion. ‘His father rated him soundly; but there is a conjunction of some planets to-night, a great occasion at the observatory, and he was obliged to go—’

‘How can a man be so inconceivably clumsy?’ said the Countess. ‘Theology was not bad enough, but astronomy must be lugged in!’

Irritation gave her voice increased brilliancy, and she ended her song amid what the English call a thunder of applause.

Théodore, who was in mortal dread of her, was not backward in paying her his tribute of admiration as she resumed her seat; but she accepted his compliments with coldness amounting to incivility, and their hostility was but fomented.

He went off to console himself with Flavie. She still had too much pretension to beauty not to hate a woman who intercepted so much admiration.

‘And do you mean to say that you really think that woman sings well?’ Madame Colleville scornfully asked the advocate.

‘At least I had to tell her so,’ replied la Peyrade, ‘since she alone can save our souls with Brigitte. But look at your Céleste. She never takes her eyes off the door, and every time a tray is brought in, though it is too late for any more arrivals, her face falls with disappointment.’

It must be mentioned, by the way, that since Madame de Godollo had risen to power, trays of refreshments were freely handed on reception days and on no mean scale, loaded with ices, cakes, and fruit syrups from Tanrade, the best provider.

'Leave me in peace!' said Flavie, 'I know what the little goose is thinking about. You are only too certain to marry her.'

'But am I doing it for my own sake?' asked la Peyrade. 'Is it not my inevitable fate, in view of insuring future prosperity for all of us? Come, come, now, there are tears in your eyes; I must leave you, you are too unreasonable. The deuce! If you want the end, you want the means, as that prig, old Phellion, says.'

He went to join a group consisting of Céleste, Madame Thuillier, Madame de Godollo, Colleville, and Phellion.

Madame Colleville followed him, and, stung by the fit of jealousy she had hinted at to unmotherly ferocity,—

'Céleste,' said she, 'why do not you sing? Several of these gentlemen have wished to hear you.'

'Oh! mamma,' said Céleste, 'with my poor little voice after Madame de Godollo. Besides, as you know, I have a little cold.'

'That is to say that as usual you are airified and disobliging. You sing as you can, and every voice has its own merits.'

'My dear,' said Colleville, who, having just lost twenty francs at cards, in the courage of his vexation found spirit enough to contradict his wife, 'you sing as you can is a mere vulgar axiom. You sing with your voice if you have one, and above all not after hearing an operatic voice like the Countess's. For my part I am ready to let Céleste off the performance of one of her little cooing love-songs.'

'Much good is there in paying masters so dear and getting nothing in return!' And she walked away.

'So Félix has ceased to inhabit the earth,' said Colleville, carrying on the conversation which Flavie had interrupted. 'He dwells among the stars?'

'My dear old friend,' said Phellion, 'I am as much annoyed as you can be, to find my son neglecting the oldest friends of the family. And although the contempla-

tion of the vast luminous bodies suspended in space by the Creator's hand is of greater interest in my opinion than your overwrought brain seems to think, I consider that if Félix fails to come this evening, as he promised me he would, he will fail in the barest good manners. And I will let him know it too, you may rely on that.'

'Science is a fine thing,' said Théodore. 'But it is a drawback that it makes men bears and maniacs.'

'To say nothing,' added Céleste, 'of its undermining all ideas of religion.'

'In that you are mistaken, my dear child!' said the Countess. 'Pascal, himself a splendid instance of the falsity of your view, said, if I am not mistaken, that a little science leads us away from religion, but a great deal brings us back to it.'

'Nevertheless, Madame, everybody agrees that Monsieur Félix is very learned. When he was giving my brother lessons, nothing could be clearer or more intelligible, François said, than his explanations. And you see he is none the more religious.'

'And I tell you, my good child, that Monsieur Félix is not irreligious, but that with a little sweetness and patience nothing will be easier than to bring him back to the fold.'

'Bring a philosopher back to the practice of religion! That, Madame,' said la Peyrade, 'seems to me a difficult matter. These gentlemen place the aim and end of their studies above all else. For instance, tell a mathematician or a geologist that the Church imperatively insists that Sunday shall be kept holy by the postponement of every kind of work — he will but shrug his shoulders, though God himself did not disdain to rest on the seventh day.'

'At the same time it is quite true,' said Céleste innocently, 'that by not coming here this evening Monsieur Félix is guilty not merely of bad manners, but of actual sin.'

'But tell me, my pretty child,' answered Madame de

Godollo, ‘do you really think that God is better pleased at seeing us meet here this evening to sing songs, eat ices, and malign our neighbours as is so often done in drawing-rooms, than at seeing a man of learning in an observatory studying the glorious secrets of creation?’

‘There is a time for all things,’ retorted Céleste, ‘and as Monsieur de la Peyrade says, God himself did not disdain to rest.’

‘But, my dear girl, God had time to rest,’ said Madame de Godollo. ‘He is eternal.’

‘That,’ said la Peyrade, ‘is one of the smartest and wittiest of impious speeches. These are the arguments that serve the turn of worldly people. The commandments of God are “interpreted,” however explicit and positive they may be. One is taken and another left; distinctions are drawn; the free-thinker submits them to his sovereign revision, and from free-thinking it is but a step to free conduct.’

During the lawyer’s harangue Madame de Godollo had an eye on the clock: it was half-past eleven. The room was gradually getting empty. Only one card-table still stood open, occupied by Thuillier, the elder Minard, and two new acquaintances. Phellion had left the little group with whom he had been talking, and had joined his wife and Brigitte in a corner; and from his eager gesticulations he was evidently moved by feelings of the deepest indignation. All hope of seeing the truant now was evidently lost.

‘Monsieur,’ said the Countess to la Peyrade, ‘do you do the gentlemen of the Rue des Postes the honour of believing them to be good Catholics?’

‘Beyond a doubt,’ said the lawyer, ‘religion has no more staunch supporters.’

‘Well, this morning,’ said the lady, ‘I had the honour of being received by Father Anselme. Though he is a pattern of every Christian virtue, the reverend Father is recognised as a very able mathematician.’

‘I never said, Madame, that the two qualities were irreconcilable.’

‘But you did say that a good Christian ought to do no work of any kind on a Sunday ; Father Anselme must, therefore, be a terrible miscreant, for when I was admitted to his room I found him in front of a blackboard, a bit of chalk in his hand, engaged on a problem that was, no doubt, somewhat difficult, for the board was almost covered with algebraic formulas ; and I may add that he did not seem alarmed at the idea of any scandal, since a person whose name I am not at liberty to mention — a young savant of great promise — was engaged with him in this profane occupation.’

Céleste and Madame Thuillier looked at each other, and each saw a gleam of hope in the other’s eyes.

‘Why cannot you give the name of the younger man ?’ said Madame Thuillier, who always spoke out without any tact.

‘Because he has not, as Father Anselme has, the shelter of his holiness to absolve him for such a flagrant desecration of Sunday ; also,’ said Madame de Godollo with evident meaning, ‘because he entreated me not to say that I had met him in that place.’

‘Then you know a good many young and learned men ?’ said Céleste. ‘For this one and Monsieur Phellion make two already.’

‘My dear child,’ said the Countess, ‘you are an inquisitive little puss. But you cannot make me say what I do not intend to say — especially after what Father Anselme told me in confidence, for your brain would be off at a gallop.’

This it was already ; and every word the Countess spoke seemed to add to the girl’s uneasiness.

‘For my part,’ said la Peyrade ironically, ‘I should not be in the least surprised if Father Anselme’s colleague were Monsieur Félix Phellion himself. Voltaire was always on

excellent terms with the Jesuits who had brought him up ; only he did not discuss religion with them.'

'Ah ! well, my young philosopher does discuss it with his reverend and scientific colleague. He has explained his doubts, and in fact, that was the starting-point of their friendship as scientific men.'

'And does Father Anselme hope to convert his young friend ?' asked Céleste.

'He is sure of it,' replied the Countess. 'The young mathematician, with the exception only of religious training, has been brought up in admirable principles. He also knows that his return to the Church would make the happiness of a charming girl whom he loves and who loves him. Now, my dear child, you will not get another word from me and must fancy what you please.'

'Oh, dear godmother !' cried Céleste, speaking in all the guilelessness of her heart, 'if it should be he !'

And she threw herself into Madame Thuillier's arms with a burst of tears.

At this instant by a singular coincidence a servant threw open the door and announced Monsieur Félix Phellion.

The young professor came in perspiring profusely, his tie askew, and quite out of breath.

'A pretty hour this !' said Phellion severely.

'I could not help it, father,' said Felix, as he made his way across the room to Madame Thuillier and Céleste. 'I could not leave till the phenomenon was over, and I found no cab. I have run all the way.'

'Your ears must have been burning,' said la Peyrade, in a sneering tone, 'for you were foremost in the thoughts of these ladies but a moment ago ; they were trying to solve a serious problem concerning you.'

Félix made no reply ; he saw Brigitte come into the room, returning from the dining-room whither she had been to tell the servant to bring in no more refreshments ; he hastened to greet her.

After hearing some mild reproofs as to the rarity of his visits, and being dismissed forgiven by a gracious ‘Better late than never,’ he turned again to his pole-star and was a good deal surprised to hear Madame de Godollo say to him : —

‘I hope, Monsieur, to be forgiven for an indiscretion I was betrayed into in the heat of conversation ; I told these ladies, in spite of your express prohibition, where I last saw you, only this morning.’

‘Where I had the honour of meeting you ?’ said Félix.  
‘But, Madame, I did not see you.’

A faint smile lighted up la Peyrade’s face.

‘You so certainly saw me that you spoke to me and pledged me to secrecy. However, I have not compromised you beyond the exact truth ; I only said that you sometimes call on Father Anselme, and that hitherto you had met on scientific grounds, but that you defend your doubts against him quite as stoutly as against Céleste.’

‘Father Anselme !’ said Félix, stupidly puzzled.

‘Why, of course !’ said la Peyrade, ‘a great mathematician, who does not despair of converting you. Mademoiselle Céleste wept for joy.’

Félix looked about him in utter bewilderment. Madame de Godollo looked at him with an expression that a dog would have understood.

‘I only wish I could have done anything half so satisfactory to Mademoiselle Céleste,’ he said at length, ‘but I am afraid, Madame, that you are mistaken.’

‘Listen to me, Monsieur. I will dot my *i*’s, and if your bashfulness prompts you to hide to the last a proceeding of which you have no reason to be ashamed, contradict me. I will submit to it as a punishment for having divulged a secret which, as I frankly confess, you commended to my discretion.’

Madame Thuillier and Céleste were a perfect spectacle in themselves ; never were doubt and expectation more strongly painted on human features.

Measuring each word, Madame de Godollo went on :—

‘ I told these ladies, because I know how deeply they are interested in your salvation, and because you were accused of shamelessly defying God’s commandments by working on Sunday — I told them, I say, that I had met you this morning in Father Anselme’s room in the Rue des Postes — that he, as learned as yourself, was engaged with your help in working out a problem ; I said that your interviews with that holy and enlightened man had led to other discussions ; that you had laid your religious doubts before him, and that he did not despair of refuting them. There is nothing to humiliate your self-respect in confirming my statements. It is merely that you had prepared a surprise for Céleste, and I unluckily let it out. But when she hears you say that I have spoken the truth, you will still give her such happiness that you cannot refuse to speak the words she hopes for.’

‘ Why, surely, Monsieur, there can be no disgrace in seeking for the light ; you, who are so honest, so averse to an untruth, can hardly deny a fact that the Countess so steadily affirms ! ’ said la Peyrade.

Félix hesitated a moment ; then he said to Céleste : ‘ Will you, Mademoiselle Céleste, let me speak two words to you alone ? ’

Céleste rose, and at an approving nod from Madame Thuillier Félix took her hand and led her into a window recess two yards from where they were all standing.

‘ Céleste,’ he said, in a low tone, ‘ I entreat you to wait a little longer. Why, look,’ and he pointed to Charles’s Wain in the sky, ‘ up and away beyond the visible stars there lies a future for us all. As to Father Anselme, I cannot confirm anything, for it is not true. It is a kindly meant fiction. But have patience, you shall hear things — ’

Céleste turned away, leaving him to gaze at the stars.

'He is gone mad!' said she, in despairing accents, as she took her place by Madame Thuillier.

And Félix confirmed the diagnosis by rushing out of the room without observing how anxiously Phellion and his mother followed close on his heels.

While all the bystanders gazed in dismay at this sudden exit, la Peyrade went up to Madame de Godollo.

'You must admit,' he said very politely, 'that it is very difficult to pull a man out of the water when he is bent on drowning—'

'I had not, I confess, conceived of such imbecility,' answered the Countess. 'It is too idiotic. I go over to the enemy; and with that enemy, whenever he pleases, I will go into a full and frank explanation, in my own rooms.'

Théodore, next morning, was devoured by curiosity on two points: How would Céleste decide in the choice she was to make? What could this Countess Torna de Godollo have to say to him, and what did she want of him?

The first of these questions certainly seemed first to claim an answer; and yet, a secret instinct drew la Peyrade toward a more immediate solution of the second. Still, as he made up his mind to go first to the Countess, he quite understood that, in the meeting to which he had been invited, he could not be too carefully prepared and equipped.

It had rained in the morning, and this foreseeing mind did not need telling that a splash staining the polish of a boot may bring a man to discomfiture. So he sent the porter to fetch him a cab, and at about three o'clock drove off from the Rue Saint-Dominique-d'Enfer towards the more fashionable district of the Madeleine.

That he had devoted much thought to his toilet may be easily supposed; it must hit the happy medium between the

free and easy style of morning wear and the full dress of an after-dinner call. Required by his profession to wear a white neckcloth, which he very rarely failed to display, and yet not daring to appear in a frock coat, he felt the risk of falling into one of the two extremes which he thought it desirable to avoid. But in a tail-coat closely buttoned across, and gloves of a neutral tint, instead of straw-colour, he escaped too great solemnity, and, at the same time, had not the very provincial and poor-relation appearance that comes of evening dress out walking at an hour when the sun is still above the horizon.

Our crafty diplomatist took care not to be driven to the door of the house. He would not have liked the occupant of the entresol to see him getting out of a hackney-cab, and he would have feared the eyes of the first-floor residents, detecting him in a visit to the rooms beneath them ; it would have given rise to endless comments. So he was set down at the corner of the Rue Royale ; thence, by walking on the fairly dry footway, and carefully picking his steps, he reached the house immaculate.

He was there so lucky as not to be seen from the porter's lodge. The husband, a beadle at the church of the Madeleine, was on duty, and his wife was showing some still vacant rooms to an intending tenant. So Théodore, escaping inspection, stole up to the door of the sanctuary to which he was to be admitted.

A gentle pull at a rope trimmed with gimp rang a bell within. A few seconds later another and a more emphatic peal, of shriller tone, seemed intended to warn the maid-servant that she was too slow in answering the door ; and, in point of fact, immediately after, a woman of mature age, too respectable to wear the costume of a chambermaid in a comedy, had admitted him.

The lawyer gave her his name, and was desired to wait in a dining-room of severely luxurious taste. The maid returned at once, and ushered him into the most fascinating

and splendid drawing-room that is conceivable under the low ceiling of an entresol.

The divinity of the place sat by a table covered with a cloth of Italian design, in which gold thread sparkled among the rich colours of fine embroidery. As la Peyrade went in, she bowed without rising. The maid placed a chair, the Countess, meanwhile, saying, ‘ You will excuse me, Monsieur, if I seal a note to be sent in a hurry?’

The lawyer bowed assent. The foreign lady took from a desk inlaid with tortoise-shell, in the style of Boulle, a sheet of blue-tinted English note-paper, which she enclosed in an envelope, and, after writing the address, she rose and rang the bell.

The maid at once came in, lighted a spirit-lamp set in a little stand ornamented with pretty sculptured figures; over the flame hung a little silver-gilt pannikin, containing a scrap of scented sealing-wax. As soon as the heat had melted the wax, the maid dropped it on to the note, and handed her mistress an engraved seal. The lady stamped it with her own fair hands, and said, ‘ Send this at once.’

The woman stepped forward to take the letter, but from inadvertence or over-haste, the document fell at la Peyrade’s feet, and as he quickly stooped to pick it up, he involuntarily read the address. It was to *Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires étrangères*. And above, in one corner, the significant word, *private*, gave the missive a character of intimacy.

‘ I beg your pardon,’ said the lady, taking the note from la Peyrade’s hand, for he had the good taste to restore it to her, so as to render the little service to the mistress. ‘ And have the goodness not to lose it,’ she added severely, to the luckless waiting-woman.

Having thus dismissed her, the Hungarian Countess moved from the chair in front of the writing-table, and seated herself on a sofa upholstered in pale grey satin.

During all this little flutter of business, la Peyrade had

had the pleasure of taking stock of the splendour about him. Pictures by recognised masters showed up against a sober background, enlivened by silk cord and gimp ; on a stand of gilt wood was an enormous Chinese jar ; in front of the windows were flower-stands, in which a *lilium rubrum*, with its twisted petals, hung over dwarf camellias white and red, and little Chinese magnolia shrubs, with their creamy white flowers tipped with rose ; then, in one corner, hung a trophy of weapons, strange and very gorgeous, accounted for by the semi-barbarous nationality of the owner. Finally, some bronzes and statuettes of exquisite workmanship, and on the seats, which rolled smoothly over a carpet of Turkish design, a medley anarchy of pillows and stuffs, completed the furniture of the room, which the lawyer had last seen with Thuillier and Brigitte, before it was inhabited. It was transfigured beyond recognition.

With a little more knowledge of the world the lawyer would have been less surprised at the infinite pains the Countess had devoted to the arrangement of this little place. A woman's drawing-room is her kingdom, where she is absolute sovereign : there she reigns and rules in the fullest sense of the words. There she has to fight more than one battle, and almost always comes off victorious. In fact, has she not chosen every ornament, and harmonised all the colours, and does she not light or shade it to her taste ? If she has any intelligent sense of stage-arrangement, it is impossible but that everything about her should be placed by her hand where it tells with the best effect ; impossible but that all her personal advantages should be thrown into rare relief. You may say that you do not know all a woman's perfections till you have seen her in the prismatic light of her own drawing-room ; but, on the other hand, beware of attempting to gauge and appraise her if you have never seen her anywhere else.

Coquettishly sunk in a corner of the sofa, her head

carelessly resting on one arm of which the rounded whiteness could be seen to the elbow in the loose open sleeve of a black velvet wrapper, a foot for Cinderella, in an easy but tiny Russia-leather slipper, resting on an orange plush cushion stamped with flowers in relief, the fair Hungarian looked like a portrait by Lawrence or Winterhalter, but her attitude was more artless.

'Monsieur,' said she, with a smile, and the slight foreign accent which gave added witchery to her speech, 'I cannot help regarding it as a very droll thing that a man of your talent and keen penetration should have thought of me as an enemy.'

'Indeed, Madame la Comtesse,' replied Théodore, showing in his eyes some astonishment, not unmixed with distrust, 'appearances, as you must allow, justified my simplicity. A rival crossed my path when I was going on towards a marriage which offered itself to me as in every way suitable. By a happy miracle this rival was clumsy to a degree, and not difficult to set aside, when, suddenly, the most charming and unlooked-for auxiliary rushed in to aid him on precisely the most vulnerable side.' . . .

'And you must confess,' said the Countess, laughing, 'that my protégé was brilliant and seconded my efforts nobly!'

'His blundering, I fancy,' said la Peyrade, 'was not altogether unexpected by you; the encouragement with which you honoured him, Madame, was all the more cruelly tantalizing to me.'

'And what great misfortune would it be,' the lady went on with fascinating insidiousness, 'if you were exempt from marrying Mademoiselle Céleste? Are you really so devoted, Monsieur, to that little schoolgirl?'

In the word, but yet more in the tone given to it, there was something more than scorn, there was hatred. This accent was sure not to escape so keen an observer as la Peyrade. Still, as he was not the man to venture very far on the strength of this simple remark, he went on:—

‘Madame, the vulgar phrase “to get settled” sums up the situation when a man, after a long struggle, is at an end of his efforts and his illusions, and ready to come to terms with the future for better or worse. Well, when *settling* appears under the form of a girl — with more virtue than beauty, I do not deny, but who can bring her husband the money that is indispensable for conjugal happiness, — is it surprising that gratitude should fill his heart, and that he should jump at the peaceful joys which seem to smile on him?’

‘I had always thought,’ replied the lady, ‘that a man’s intelligence and purview ought to be the measure of his ambition; and I supposed that one so profoundly clever as to proclaim himself the advocate of the poor would have less modest, less rustic aspirations.’

‘Ah! Madame, the iron hand of necessity forces stranger forms of resignation on us than that. The question of daily bread is one before which every other pales, and to which everything yields. Was not Apollo compelled for his living to keep the sheep of Admetus?’

‘But the folds of Admetus were at any rate those of a king,’ replied Madame de Godollo. ‘Apollo would certainly never have submitted to be shepherd to a — middle-class citizen.’

The pause made in the conclusion by the handsome Hungarian seemed to be leading up to a name, and la Peyrade felt that out of mere mercy the words ‘a Thuillier’ had been left out of the argument, which had been clinched by the mention of the species instead of going so far as the individual.

‘I feel, Madame,’ said the lawyer, ‘that the distinction is no less true than subtle. But Apollo has no choice.’

‘I do not like men who value themselves too highly,’ said the Countess stiffly, ‘but even less I like those who undersell their merchandise. I am always afraid lest they should be making me the dupe of some clever and elab-

orate trick. You, Monsieur, are fully aware of your own value, and your hypocritical humility annoys me greatly. It proves that my overtures of good-will have not given rise to even a beginning of confidence between us.'

'I assure you, on my honour, that up to this time life has given me no reason to believe myself possessed of any flagrant superiority.'

'Well,' said the lady, 'I ought, perhaps, to believe in the modesty of a man who was prepared to accept the humiliating issue which I endeavoured to hinder.'

'As I, perhaps, ought to believe in the reality of the benevolence, which, in order to rescue me, had previously chastened me so severely,' said la Peyrade, with meaning.

The Hungarian glanced at him reproachfully; she played with one of the ends of her sash, and, casting down her eyes, gave vent to a sigh, so faintly perceptible that it might almost have passed as part of her regular breathing.

'You are rancorous,' said she, 'and judge people from general impressions. After all,' she added, 'you are possibly justified in reminding me that I took a roundabout way of interfering — absurdly enough — in concerns which are no business of mine. Go on, my dear sir, and prosper in this brilliant marriage where you find so many advantages combined; only allow me to wish that you may never repent of a success which I will no longer strive to postpone.'

The Provençal had not been spoiled by women. Poverty, against which he had so long been struggling, does not throw gallant adventures in a man's way; and even since he had freed himself from its worst clutches, devoting all his thoughts to his future prospects, with the exception of the farce played with Madame Colleville, 'affairs of the heart' had filled a very small part of his life. Like all the men who are overwhelmingly busy and yet goaded by the demon of the flesh, he was content with

the ignoble love-making that may be bought any night at a street corner, and that is easily reconciled with the externals of devotion.

Thus the perplexity of a novice in such adventures may be imagined, as he found himself balancing between the fear of losing a delightful opportunity, and that of finding a serpent under the flowers that seemed within his reach. Too much reserve, too lukewarm an eagerness, might offend the fair foreigner's self-esteem, and suddenly dry up the fount at which she seemed to invite him to drink; but if, on the other hand, this apparent forwardness on her part were but a snare; if the kindness — to him quite inexplicable — of which he had so suddenly become the object, aimed solely at betraying him into some false step, to be used subsequently as a weapon against himself to embroil him with the Thuilliers, what a blow that would be to his reputation for cleverness, what a poor figure he would cut as the dog dropping the substance for the shadow.

As we have seen, la Peyrade was of the school of Tartuffe; and the candour with which that master explains to Elmire that without some earnest of the favours to which he aspires he cannot believe in her affectionate advances, seemed to the lawyer not inapplicable to the present occasion — a little softened in the expression.

'Madame la Comtesse,' said he, 'you place me in a position in which I am much to be pitied. I was proceeding cheerfully to this union — you destroy my faith in it; and yet, if I should break it off, what use am I, with these brilliant gifts, to make of my recovered liberty?'

'La Bruyère, I think, remarks that nothing so cools the blood as having escaped committing a folly.'

'No doubt. Still, that is but a negative blessing. I am of an age and in such circumstances as require me to look for some more definite results. The interest you vouchsafe to feel in me surely does not end at leaving me

a blank page. I love Mademoiselle Colleville, not indeed with imperious and overwhelming passion, but I do love her; her hand has been promised me, and before giving it up—'

'So, under special circumstances,' said the Countess quickly, 'you might be prepared to break it off; and,' she added, in a calmer tone, 'there might be some chance of convincing you that by thus seizing the first offer you are compromising your future career—that other opportunities might present themselves?'

'But, then, Madame, it would be wise to foresee some glimpse of them.'

This determination to be on the safe side seemed to irritate the Countess.

'Faith is a virtue only because it trusts in the unseen,' said she. 'You distrust yourself, another form of awkwardness! I am not happy in those I select as my protégés.'

'But at any rate, Madame, am I very indiscreet in wishing to have some remote notion of the prospect your kindness may have imagined for me?'

'Highly indiscreet,' said the lady coldly, 'for it is evident that you only pledge yourself to conditional obedience. Say no more about it. You have gone far with Mademoiselle Colleville; she suits you in many ways: marry her. One struggle more—you will not again find me in your way.'

'But does Mademoiselle Colleville suit me so well?' said la Peyrade. 'That is precisely the point on which you have raised a doubt in my mind. And do you not think it really cruel to fling at me two such contradictory statements without any proof to support either?'

'Ah!' said the Countess, out of patience, 'I must bring documentary evidence for my opinions? Well, Monsieur, there is only one very conclusive fact that I can swear to: Céleste does not love you.'

'I confess,' said la Peyrade, 'that I am certainly pledged to a marriage of convenience.'

'And she never can love you,' Madame de Godollo went on, with warmth, 'because she can never understand you. Her true match is that fair little man, as shy and pasty-faced as herself. The contact of those two placid and lifeless natures will result in the lukewarm duet which constitutes the *ne plus ultra* of happiness in the opinion of the world in which she was born and has lived. Just try to make the little simpleton understand that when money is so lucky as to meet talent, it may think itself honoured in the conjunction! Try to get that into the brains of the odious wretches about her! The enriched middle class! and among them you propose to find rest after your hard work and your long trials! But do you not see that twenty times a day your contribution as compared with theirs — all in money — will be weighed and found outrageously wanting? On one side the *Iliad*, the *Cid*, the *Freyschütz* and the frescoes of the Vatican; on the other, a hundred thousand crowns in hard cash — and say which will command their admiration? Do you know to what I should compare a man of imagination thrown into the middle-class atmosphere? To Daniel cast into the lions' den — minus the miracle.'

This invective against the citizen class had been poured out with such vehement conviction that it could hardly fail to be contagious.

'Ah! Madame,' exclaimed Théodore, 'how eloquently you express the ideas which have haunted my dull and anxious mind! But I have always felt myself pressed by the cruel compulsion, the necessity for making a position—'

'Necessity, position!' interrupted the Countess with even greater warmth of tone, 'mere empty words which have no ring to a superior man, but which scare fools as if they were formidable impediments. Necessity! Does it exist for the choicer spirits, for those who know what

Will means? A minister — a Gascon — uttered a motto which ought to be graven over the entrance to every career: “Everything comes to him who knows how to wait.”

‘And do you not know that to men of the highest stamp marriage is either a chain that fetters them to the vulgarest and meanest facts of existence, or else wings to bear them to the loftiest summits of the social world? The wife you need, Monsieur, and whom you may not have to long wait for in the future, unless you are in frantic haste to sell yourself for the first fortune that comes to hand, is the woman who will understand you because she is able to read you; who will be your coadjutor, your intellectual help-mate, and not a cooking-pot on two legs; who, your secretary to-day, might to-morrow hold her own as the wife of a deputy, or of an ambassador; who is capable, in short, of giving you her heart for a fulcrum, her drawing-room for a stage, her friends for a ladder; and who, as the reward of all the spring and power she could give you, would ask no more than to shine near your throne, in the glory and splendour she had foreseen would be your lot.’

Intoxicated by her own words, the Hungarian Countess was grand; her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated; she seemed to see the visions called up by her vivid eloquence, to touch them with her quivering hands. For a moment Théodore was dazzled by this sort of sunrise suddenly blazing on his life.

At the same time, as he was a monstrous prudent man, who had made it a rule to himself never to advance anything but on sound available security, he was tempted to reconsider the situation.

‘Madame la Comtesse,’ said he, ‘you blamed me just now for talking like a bourgeois, and all I have to fear is that you talk like a goddess. I admire you, I listen to you, but I am not convinced. Such sublime devotion and self-sacrifice may be found perhaps in heaven, but, on earth, who dares boast that he has met with it?’

‘You are mistaken, Monsieur,’ said the lady solemnly. ‘Such devotion is rare, but it is neither incredible nor impossible. You only need the skill to find them, and yet more the hand to hold them when they are offered you.’

With these words she rose majestically.

La Peyrade understood that he had really displeased her and was dismissed; he rose and bowed respectfully, asking permission to call now and again.

‘Monsieur,’ said Madame de Godollo, ‘among Hungarians, a primitive and almost barbarous race, when a door is open, it is wide open; when it is shut, it is double-locked.’

This dignified but ambiguous reply was emphasised by a slight bow. La Peyrade went away, bewildered by manners so new to him, so unlike those of Flavie, of Brigitte, or Madame Minard, and wondering, as he went, whether he had played the game well.

On leaving Madame de Godollo, la Peyrade felt that he must have time to think. Beneath the surface of his conversation with this strange woman, what was it that he could discern — a trap, or the offer of a rich wife. In this dilemma it would be neither intelligent nor prudent to press Céleste for her decision, since asking for her ultimatum would force an engagement on himself, and close the door to the chances, vague indeed, which had been hinted to him.

The upshot of his consultation with himself, as he walked along the Boulevard, was that for the moment he must think only of gaining time. So, instead of calling at the Thuilliers’, he went to his own rooms, and there wrote the following note: —

‘MY DEAR THUILLIER: —

‘You will not, I dare say, have thought it strange that I should not have gone to your house to-day. Apart from

my dread of what my sentence may be, I did not care to appear like an impatient and ill-bred dun. A day or two more or less count for little in such a case, but Mademoiselle Céleste may find them advantageous for her perfect freedom of decision. You will see me no more till you write to me. I have recovered some degree of composure, and added a few pages to our manuscript, and we can now be ready to hand it over complete to the printers in a very short time.

‘Ever yours,

‘THÉODOSE DE LA PEYRADE.’







